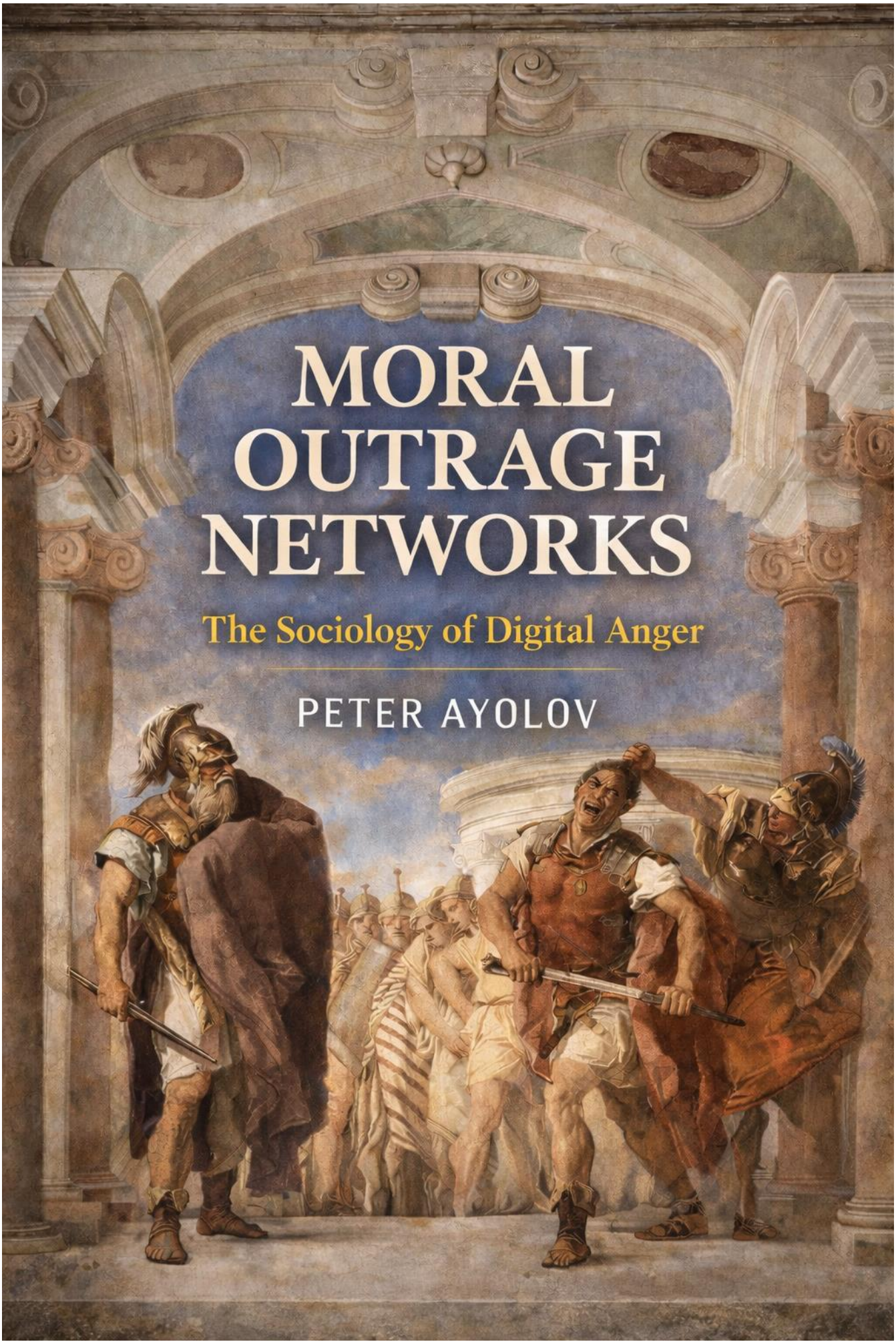
MORAL
OUTRAGE
NETWORKS
The Sociology of Digital Anger
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Moral Outrage Networks, The Sociology of Digital Anger

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Foreword: Networks of Conspicuous Morality

From Moral Emotion to Networked Infrastructure

'Sing, goddess, the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans.'

Homer, Iliad

Classical literature knew that collective anger could unify fractured worlds more effectively than justice or wisdom. Homer's Iliad opens not with a hymn to reason but with an invocation of anger, and the figure of Agamemnon stands at the centre of this drama. His rage is not righteous, pious or just. It is repeatedly described as impious, greedy or hubristic, provoking divine punishment and human catastrophe. The poem contrasts his pointless anger toward the priest Chryses with the righteous anger of Chryses himself, and sets Achilles' cosmic mēnis against Agamemnon's personal and political fury. Even when Agamemnon justifies his actions as sacrifices for the common good, his self-portrayal is unmasked as a refusal of accountability. Yet this deeply flawed anger performs a decisive social function. It binds the Greeks into a single imagined community under the banner of revenge for wounded dignity and dishonoured kin. It does not matter that this unity is mythical. What matters is that anger, not justice, becomes the unifying force. That ancient pattern has returned, amplified by digital networks that turn private indignation into global infrastructure.

This book continues arguments[1] developed in the 'The Economic Policy of Online Media: Manufacture of Dissent' and the article[2] 'Moral Outrage Networks: The Sociology of Digital Anger'. That earlier work demonstrated how contemporary online media systems do not merely inform publics but organise dissent as a profitable resource. Since then, a growing body of research and everyday observation has confirmed an even more disturbing conclusion: moral anger is not a side-effect of digital communication in the twenty-first century but its primary driving force. Online platforms do not simply distribute outrage; they are structurally dependent on it. The architecture of clicks, shares, comments and algorithmic visibility transforms indignation into attention, and attention into revenue. The moral anger has become the central energy source of the online public sphere. Human nature has never existed outside its dominant communication technologies. Every major transformation in media has not only restructured public discourse but has reshaped cognition, emotion, and the architecture of collective life. Speaking in tribal societies created memory cultures organised around ritual, myth, and face-to-face moral regulation. Writing introduced abstraction, law, bureaucracy, and the first large-scale moral systems detached from immediate presence. Printing stabilised doctrine, ideology, and the modern nation. Newspapers and telegraphy synchronised publics in time, while radio and television unified dispersed populations into simultaneous emotional communities. The Internet, however, has not merely extended these processes. It has altered the very structure of emotional life. Moral anger, once bound to embodied communities and slow cycles of interpretation, has become instantaneous, networked, contagious, and economically productive.

The argument begins from a simple but disturbing observation: anger now circulates more efficiently than truth. In digital environments, moral emotions are no longer by-products of

[1] Ayolov, P. (2023). The Economic Policy of Online Media. Taylor & Francis.
[2] Ayolov, P. (2025). Moral Outrage Networks: The Sociology of Digital Anger. Zenodo.

political conflict but its primary infrastructure. Communication online is no longer oriented toward understanding, deliberation, or even persuasion. It is increasingly structured around affect management. The fundamental task of public speech in social networks has become the orchestration of outrage. Speaking today is not the transmission of facts but the activation of moral triggers. What matters is not whether a claim is true but whether it fits the emotional grammar of a group and produces indignation. This shift represents a civilisational threshold. When the medium becomes the dominant architect of emotion, the sociology of language must be rewritten. In earlier societies, righteous anger was cultivated inside bounded communities: religious congregations, political movements, professional guilds. Moral discipline operated through shared ritual and slow collective interpretation. Today moral anger is generated in transnational algorithmic spaces in which anonymity, speed, visibility and economic incentive collapse the distance between stimulus and reaction. Human nature is no longer merely social. It is infrastructural.

The Medium is the Message: From Speech to Networked Emotion

Every medium produces a new form of humanity. Spoken language trained memory, repetition and mythic thought. Writing externalised memory and introduced the abstraction of rule. Print normalised linearity, ideology and authority. Newspapers created mass publics. Radio created emotional synchronisation. Television industrialised spectacle. The Internet, however, does not merely distribute messages; it reorganises affect. It turns emotions into data flows. In digital platforms, language is fragmented into titles, posts, memes, hashtags and comments. Each fragment functions as an emotional vector. Moral anger no longer accumulates through narrative but through instantaneous micro-provocations. Sociology can no longer understand collective emotion through classical categories such as class consciousness or ideological formation. Moral outrage is now assembled from fragments of language optimised for clickability. This is why facts no longer persuade. Facts are inert objects in an environment governed by emotional velocity. What convinces today is affective resonance. Language works when it violates expectations, confirms prejudice, or threatens identity. Communication has become anger management: the strategic activation of indignation to shape behaviour. This dynamic underlies the contemporary version of what was once theorised as the manufacture of consent and dissent. In digital networks, attention is scarce, and anger is abundant. The result is an emotional economy in which outrage functions as currency. Online audiences are not persuaded; they are activated.

The Architecture of Digital Anger

The book examines how online anger has become the central mechanism driving contemporary dissent. Unlike classical propaganda, which depended on coordinated ideological messaging, digital outrage arises organically from platform architectures that reward provocation, incivility and emotional extremity. Comment-hosting services, troll cultures and algorithmic curation have transformed audiences from spectators into emotionally reactive participants whose anger generates traffic, visibility and revenue. Comment systems such as Disqus, Livefyre, Echo, IntenseDebate and Discourse emerged not simply to host discussion but to industrialise reaction. Their economic function is not deliberation but engagement. Each comment is a signal; each reaction is a metric. In this environment, outrage is productive labour. It keeps

users scrolling, clicking, returning. Research confirms the structural dominance of anger. Rui Fan[3] et al. demonstrated in their 2014 Weibo study that anger spreads faster than joy, sadness or disgust. Their 2017 agent-based model showed that anger dominates networks even when initially less frequent. Arpan[4] and Nabi's 2011 research established that anger motivates news consumption more than neutral information. Buckels, Trapnell and Paulhus in 2014 revealed the sadistic[5] motivations underlying trolling behaviour. Cheng[6] et al. in 2017 demonstrated that anyone can become a troll under certain conditions. Anderson[7] et al. in 2014 documented the 'nasty effect', showing how online incivility amplifies risk perception. These findings dismantle the myth that digital anger is accidental. It is systemic. Platforms are not corrupted by rage; they are structured by it.

Righteous Communities to Outrage Networks

Molly Crockett's 2017 article[8] 'Moral outrage in the digital age' marked a turning point in the understanding of digital anger. Crockett demonstrated that moral outrage is both socially rewarding and behaviourally contagious in online environments. It motivates punishment, condemnation and dehumanisation. The crucial shift is that outrage is no longer triggered by shared moral reflection but by incentives embedded in platform design. Freedom of comment, anonymity and algorithmic visibility reward emotional escalation. The more extreme the language, the more visible the speaker. Moral outrage is no longer anchored in moral reasoning. It is anchored in metrics. This produces a new sociolinguistic phenomenon: outrage as syntax. Digital language is no longer evaluated by coherence or truth but by its ability to trigger reactions. Hashtags, slogans, memes and captions function as affective detonators. Moral anger is not expressed; it is engineered. The result is a moral public sphere without morality: a constant simulation of righteousness detached from ethical deliberation. Before the Internet, moral anger was embedded in institutions. Religious communities disciplined anger through doctrine and ritual. Political movements cultivated it through ideology. These structures slowed emotion, stabilised interpretation and limited contagion. Digital networks abolish those buffers. Anger is now global, instantaneous and disembedded. It jumps across weak ties, crosses ideological boundaries and overwhelms interpretative traditions. It no longer belongs to communities; it produces them. Frances Haugen's disclosures[9] confirmed this architecture. She described how Facebook's algorithms reward polarising content because anger increases engagement. Platforms do not merely tolerate division; they depend on it. Evgeny Morozov[10] warned in 2017 that moral panic over fake news hides the real enemy: digital capitalism. The

[3] Fan, R., Xu, K. & Zhao, J. (2017). An agent-based model for emotion contagion. arXiv:1706.02676.
[4] Arpan, L. M. & Nabi, R. L. (2011). Exploring anger in the hostile media process. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 88(1), 5–22.
[5] Buckels, E. E., Trapnell, P. D. & Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Trolls just want to have fun. Personality and Individual Differences, 67, 97–102.
[6] Cheng, J. et al. (2017). Anyone can become a troll. arXiv:1702.01119.
[7] Anderson, A. A. et al. (2014). The nasty effect: Online incivility and risk perceptions of emerging technologies. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 19(3), 373–387.
[8] Crockett, M. J. (2017). Moral outrage in the digital age. Nature Human Behaviour.
[9] Haugen, F. (2023). The Power of One. Hachette UK.

[10]Morozov, E. (2017). Moral panic over fake news hides the real enemy – the digital giants. The Guardian.

problem is not misinformation but monetised emotion. The Internet has become a dissent industry whose raw material is outrage.

The Perpetual Indignation in Network Society

The digital public sphere is not a space of dialogue but a space of testing. Communication functions as moral trial. Each message is a provocation designed to sort audiences into camps. Agreement is less valuable than activation. Dissent is not a failure; it is a feature. This transforms the sociology of language. Speech no longer mediates understanding; it produces alignment or hostility. Communities are not built through shared knowledge but through shared indignation. Online moral anger therefore operates as a collective emotion. It is global, contagious and infrastructure-driven. It no longer reflects injustice; it manufactures it. The rise of moral outrage networks marks the emergence of a new emotional regime. Anger now spreads faster than reason, persists longer than truth, and generates more profit than deliberation. Digital platforms have become emotion-driven ecosystems in which outrage is the primary resource. Research consistently demonstrates that anger is the most viral emotion. It motivates consumption, intensifies participation and fragments publics. The manufacture of dissent no longer requires central propaganda. It emerges naturally from systems optimised for engagement. Human nature has not changed biologically. It has changed structurally. Communication infrastructures now shape emotional reflexes. Language no longer carries meaning; it triggers reactions. Sociology must therefore abandon outdated models of persuasion and ideology. The new struggle is not for opinion but for affect. The book argues that moral outrage is no longer a moral response. It is a network function. Until digital communication is redesigned to reward restraint rather than reaction, societies will remain trapped in cycles of manufactured anger that corrode trust, hollow discourse and replace democracy with perpetual indignation.

1. Introduction: Manufacturing Moral Anger

"The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath."

Book of Revelation 14:19

Moral anger has always existed, yet the contemporary digital environment has changed its scale, speed, form, and social function so decisively that older vocabularies struggle to keep pace. The question ‘What is the manufacturing of moral anger?’ points to a shift in the ecology of emotion itself. In earlier social orders, anger was typically anchored in embodied proximity, limited audiences, and relatively stable communities of recognition. Anger could be righteous, theatrical, strategic, or destructive, but it still tended to move through face-to-face rituals, local institutions, and slow reputational circuits. In the networked present, moral anger often appears first as language, and only later as felt experience. A title, a caption, a clipped quote, a comment thread, a repost, a screenshot, a reaction emoji, or a short video with on-screen text can summon a shared moral stance before any careful inquiry into facts has occurred. The centre of gravity moves from what happened to what the words feel like. The result is a new public emotional economy in which moral anger is not merely expressed but routinely produced, formatted, circulated, and monetised as a communicative resource. Political and social crises are entangled

with the formation of public opinion, and that public opinion in the digital environment is increasingly shaped by patterns of communication that reward conflict. In older mass-media systems, propaganda was often imagined as the manufacturing of consent. In the contemporary digital environment, the decisive mechanism is better described as the manufacturing of moral anger: organised communicative patterns that intensify indignation, generate communities through shared hostility, and convert collective emotion into attention, visibility, and political or economic leverage. Moral anger becomes a tool for orientation in a chaotic informational environment, but it also becomes a tool for mobilisation and discipline. A public sphere that constantly rehearses moral anger can look intensely political while remaining thin in trust, low in durable solidarity, and fragile in civic cooperation. Moral outrage networks may offer instant belonging, yet that belonging is frequently built on recurring linguistic cues, repeated moral framings, and predictable antagonisms rather than on slow practices of mutual responsibility.

The Infrastructuralisation of Moral Emotion

The most important difference between anger in the history of humanity and moral anger online is not that contemporary people are somehow more emotional, but that the communicative infrastructure now captures, amplifies, and standardises anger as a linguistic object. In earlier social worlds, anger was often constrained by immediate social consequences: the angry person's body was present, the target could respond in real time, and the community could impose costs through shame, exclusion, or retaliation. Even when anger was manipulated by leaders, priests, demagogues, or propagandists, its transmission still depended on slower channels and repeated physical gatherings. Digital networks replace many of these constraints with new affordances: scalability, persistence, replicability, and invisible audiences. A single utterance can be seen by thousands or millions; it can be stored, searched, and recontextualised; it can be rewarded by metrics that function as social currency. Moral anger therefore becomes less like a private eruption and more like a publicly performable stance, shaped by templates that signal virtue, loyalty, and membership. This shift has deep sociolinguistic implications. Moral anger online is often triggered not by direct injury but by symbolic injury, narrated injury, or projected injury. It is frequently induced by compressed narratives that present a moral drama in which the audience is invited to become a judging community. In such dramas, the moral vocabulary tends to be modular and portable: 'disgusting', 'shameful', 'unacceptable', 'how is this allowed', 'I can't believe', 'this is evil', 'never forget', 'do better'. These expressions work as moral indexes. They do not merely report anger; they recruit it, validate it, and synchronise it across strangers. When repeated at scale, such expressions form what can be called moral outrage networks: loosely organised publics that cohere through shared evaluative language, shared enemies, shared rituals of denunciation, and shared habits of circulation. In this environment, anger is not simply an emotion that happens to appear online; it becomes a communicative format that can be reliably produced by certain rhetorical moves. This reliability forces a reconsideration of older frameworks for aggression and anger. Konrad Lorenz's classic account of aggression in On Aggression treated aggression as a biologically grounded drive shaped by evolutionary pressures, ritualised in animal behaviour, and channelled in human societies through cultural constraints. That framework remains relevant as a background reminder that anger and aggression have deep roots, yet the digital environment introduces a historically novel situation: large-scale collective anger can be generated through language without corresponding physical proximity, and without the immediate ritual constraints that previously limited escalation. The online environment does not abolish biology, but it

rearranges the pathway from stimulus to response. A person can be morally enraged by a headline that is misleading, by an out-of-context clip, by a fabricated story, or by a real story framed to maximise outrage. The emotional outcome may be intense regardless of factual basis, because the proximate cause is linguistic framing, not direct experience. This is why moral anger online often appears less as an individual reaction to a personal event and more as a collective synchronisation process, a shared affective alignment induced by public language. At the same time, moral anger online is not purely irrational. It can emerge from genuine injustice and can support moral attention to suffering. The difficulty is that the network environment does not discriminate between morally justified anger and strategically manufactured anger. The infrastructure tends to privilege speed over reflection and intensity over nuance, and thus it privileges the linguistic performance of moral clarity. A person who hesitates, qualifies, or asks for more information risks being read as complicit, indifferent, or weak. The consequence is a cultural pressure toward immediate moral alignment. In that pressure, moral anger becomes a default communicative response, a way to display membership and to avoid suspicion. What looks like spontaneous outrage can therefore be a rational adaptation to a moralised attention economy: signalling anger is safer than signalling uncertainty.

Moral Outrage Networks and 'Angry People Click More' Principle

The economic logic that converts moral anger into value can be summarised by the principle 'angry people click more'. The phrase does not mean that every angry person clicks on everything, or that anger is the only driver of engagement. It means that anger is unusually efficient at producing measurable interactions: clicks, comments, shares, quote-posts, duets, stitches, replies, and prolonged time-on-platform. Anger is high-arousal. It creates urgency, compresses judgement, and motivates action. It also creates the illusion of agency: clicking, posting, and arguing can feel like moral participation. Platforms and online media, structured around engagement-based revenue, have strong incentives to amplify content that generates these interactions. Moral anger is particularly profitable because it carries a built-in justification. It can be marketed as principled, righteous, and socially responsible. It can be framed as care for victims, defence of truth, or resistance to oppression. In this sense, moral anger is not merely an emotion; it becomes a product category. Moral outrage networks thrive in this environment because they offer a ready-made cycle: provocation, collective reaction, escalating commentary, and renewed provocation. The cycle does not require stable organisations. It can operate through loosely connected accounts, influencers, media pages, and algorithmically recommended content. It can also operate across ideological differences, because the form of moral anger is politically flexible. Different communities can mobilise anger around different sacred objects, different taboos, and different narratives of threat. What remains constant is the communicative structure: simplified moral drama, clear villainy, strong evaluative language, and repeated calls to attention. In this structure, facts often matter less than the feelings created by words, because feelings are what drive participation. A person who wants to build a large audience therefore learns, consciously or unconsciously, to write in ways that induce moral anger. This is not necessarily a matter of cynical manipulation; it can be a pragmatic adaptation to the incentives of attention. Yet the outcome is the same: the public sphere becomes increasingly shaped by techniques that manufacture moral anger. This is also where 'echo chambers' and 'trench warfare' need to be reframed. The older debate about whether people live in isolated echo chambers or confront opponents in aggressive exchanges

misses the deeper point: both patterns can be fuelled by moral anger. Moral anger can reinforce homophily by rewarding confirmatory information and punishing dissent within the group, producing the comforting heat of shared indignation. Moral anger can also drive confrontation, because attacking an enemy can be morally pleasurable and socially rewarded. In both cases, the key mechanism is the same: moral anger supplies motivation, coherence, and a sense of purpose, turning public life into a continual moral theatre. The difference is not whether discussion is closed or open, but whether interaction is organised around anger as a primary mode of belonging. A further complication is that moral anger online can become global. Earlier forms of collective anger were often bounded by geography, language, or institutional membership. The internet weakens these boundaries. An outrage can jump languages through translation and screenshot culture. It can travel through global platforms in a matter of hours. It can recruit strangers into a shared moral identity even when they have no common local context. This creates a new sociolinguistic phenomenon: moral anger as a global coordinating signal. Hashtags, slogans, memes, and catchphrases function as portable moral markers. They allow strangers to recognise each other as allies and to recognise targets as enemies. Communities of race, ethnicity, religion, politics, sexuality, fandom, fashion, sport, and radical subcultures can all be formed and maintained through repeated moral language. The community becomes a repertoire of phrases, preferred framings, and approved emotional displays. The public identity of the group is often not a doctrine but a style of indignation. This is the point at which warnings against hate speech, intolerance, and polarisation meet a paradox. Public discourse increasingly condemns anger, yet the digital environment repeatedly rewards it. This produces a moral double-bind. Platforms may publicly adopt norms of civility while privately profiting from outrage. Influencers may denounce ‘toxicity’ while building audiences through repeated moral provocation. Communities may preach compassion while bonding through shared contempt for outsiders. The result is not the disappearance of anger but its normalisation as a routine social technology. Moral anger becomes ‘openly used’ as a way to create communal feeling, even when the dominant ideology insists that such emotional mobilisation is dangerous. This does not require explicit coordination. The incentive structure itself coordinates behaviour.

Rewriting the Theory of Propaganda Through Moral Anger

The manufacturing of moral anger also invites a rethinking of propaganda beyond the old binary of truth versus lies. Modern propaganda is often imagined as deception imposed on passive audiences. The network environment complicates that picture, because audiences participate in production. People do not merely receive anger; they perform it, refine it, and circulate it. A provocative post becomes more powerful as it is commented on, remixed, and repeated by the crowd. Moral anger is therefore crowdsourced. It is a collective labour that produces attention and value, sometimes for political actors, sometimes for media outlets, sometimes for platform shareholders, and sometimes for the community’s own sense of meaning. This is where the historical analogy to the so-called ‘Big Lie’ becomes relevant as a rhetorical mechanism rather than as a moral endorsement. The underlying principle is not simply lying; it is repetition targeted at the masses, combined with the creation of an emotional climate in which the repeated claim becomes socially real. In the network environment, repetition is no longer only top-down. It is distributed. Countless accounts can repeat the same framing, the same accusation, the same outrage cue. The repetition does not need a single central authority. The crowd itself becomes the amplifier. Intellectual protest can still occur, but the protest often functions as fuel, because indignation loves opposition. The more a claim is contested, the more it circulates, and the more

it becomes a shared object of attention. In this sense, moral anger does not merely respond to mass publics; it can create mass publics. The mass is an effect of synchronised attention, and synchronised attention is often achieved through shared indignation. This idea can be anchored in a much older text than twentieth-century propaganda theory: Homer's Iliad. The poem famously begins with an invocation of anger, an anger described as ruinous and disastrous, bound up with pride and conflict. The initiating force of the war is not merely an event of desire or betrayal but the social management of honour, insult, and collective emotion. The war is driven by speech acts that bind a community into a shared moral frame. Anger becomes contagious because it is narrated, justified, and performed in front of others. In the Iliad, anger is not only a feeling; it is a public principle that organises loyalty and conflict. The digital environment intensifies this ancient pattern by providing a global stage on which speeches, captions, and posts can trigger collective moral alignment at scale. The medium changes, but the underlying social logic remains recognisable: a community can be moved more effectively by righteous indignation than by careful wisdom, and symbolic conflict can be more mobilising than factual complexity. Yet a crucial difference remains. In Homeric war, anger is still attached to embodied risks and material consequences. In networked culture, moral anger can flourish even when the costs are externalised, delayed, or diffused. The angry person can leave a comment and feel morally satisfied without confronting the target as a human presence. The group can punish a target through mass condemnation without seeing the effects. The result is a historically novel fusion of moral intensity and social distance. This fusion is one reason moral anger online can become both more frequent and more extreme than many traditional social settings would allow. It can also become more playful, because outrage can function as entertainment. The line between moral seriousness and performative spectacle becomes unstable. Moral anger can be sincerely felt and yet simultaneously enjoyed as a communal game. From this perspective, the phrase 'moral outrage networks' describes more than emotional contagion. It describes a new form of social organisation. The network is held together by a shared moral grammar: repeated cues of offence, repeated rituals of denunciation, repeated performances of allegiance. These rituals can produce social capital within the group, even as they erode trust across groups. The network can also function as a substitute for older forms of community, offering belonging in a world of weakened institutions. That is why moral anger can appear as a form of care, a defence of values, or a demand for justice, even when it is being monetised and manipulated. The emotion is real; the incentives are also real; the two fuse into a system that repeatedly manufactures moral anger as a default mode of public life.

Anger, Put-Ons and the Quest for Identity

Marshall McLuhan once remarked that the purpose of modern media was not to soothe people but to 'put people on' them. By this he did not mean mere entertainment, but a systematic teasing, irritating and upsetting of audiences in order to make them feel the effects of media rather than merely consume its content. Media, in this sense, work by hurting people slightly, by unsettling habitual perception so that the medium itself becomes visible. What appears today as the relentless production of outrage can be reread through this lens. Contemporary communication does not simply inform. It irritates, distresses and provokes. It engineers states of emotional constriction that compel attention and force identity into the open. The word anger itself preserves this logic. Its earliest meanings in the Germanic languages do not centre on wrath but on pain, distress and narrowing. The Old Norse angra meant to grieve or vex, and its deeper Indo-European root *angh- referred to painful constriction, tightness and suffocation.

Anger is therefore not originally an explosion but a pressure. It is something that squeezes the psyche until it must react. Only later does this constriction become rage. The linguistic history already suggests that anger is a technique before it is an emotion: a way of creating discomfort in order to produce movement, alignment and change. McLuhan's concept of the 'put-on' extends this etymology into media theory. To put people on is to tease them into awareness by wounding their perceptual habits. Advertising, he argued, does not merely persuade; it irritates. It plays with frustration, envy and moral unease. This is not an accidental side-effect but a structural feature of media as extensions of the human nervous system. When a medium extends a sense, it simultaneously amputates another. Print extends the eye but diminishes the ear. Television extends the nervous system but erodes private interiority. Every extension is therefore also a form of violence. The audience is irritated into adaptation. From this perspective, the contemporary economy of outrage is not a degeneration of communication but its intensification. Digital media have perfected the put-on. Headlines, thumbnails, notifications and comment rituals are designed to constrict attention and provoke reaction. They do not simply carry information; they engineer emotional narrowing. The meaning of anger as distress, irritation and pain returns in technological form. To be angry online is to be pressed into a state of heightened alertness where identity must be displayed immediately. This brings McLuhan's second crucial idea into view: violence as the quest for identity. He argued that in the electric age individuals lose the boundaries that once stabilised the self. The wired planet dissolves privacy, overwhelms the senses and erodes the slow formation of character. People become discarnate, dispersed across information flows, no longer sure where the self ends and the environment begins. In such conditions, violence becomes a way of saying 'I am'. It is an abrasive encounter with the world that produces a feeling of reality. Terrorism, extreme art, spectacle and performative transgression are, for McLuhan, attempts to recover a lost identity through shock. Anger sits precisely at the intersection of these two ideas. It is both the irritation engineered by media put-ons and the energy through which identity is rediscovered. In digital culture this convergence is no longer episodic; it is systemic. Platforms operate as permanent counter-irritants, constantly unsettling users through comparison, exposure and provocation. The resulting moral anger is not simply felt but performed. It becomes a ritual of self-assertion in a world where the self is otherwise dissolved into metrics and feeds. The etymology of anger as constriction is crucial here. Online moral outrage rarely expands understanding. It narrows it. It compresses complex situations into binaries of good and evil. This narrowing is experienced as moral clarity, yet it is produced by the same mechanisms that McLuhan described as technological violence. The medium constricts perception in order to make people act. That action may be clicking, sharing, condemning or symbolically attacking an enemy, but it always carries the same function: to generate a moment of existential solidity in a liquid environment. In this sense, digital outrage is not simply communication about morality. It is a technique for producing collective identity. The more traditional sources of selfhood – religion, profession, locality, kinship – have weakened. The void is filled by indignation. To show what angers you is to show who you are. Slogans, profile symbols and ritual denunciations function as badges of existence. Anger is no longer only a response to injustice; it is a mode of being. McLuhan insisted that artists use provocation to prepare society for coming violence to the psyche. Today the artist has been replaced by the platform. The counter-irritant has become automated. Outrage is induced, metabolised and forgotten in cycles that resemble addiction more than deliberation. The narrowing of anger becomes the narrowing of identity. The future of collective morality will therefore be determined not by those who define ethical ideals but by those who control the put-ons of the system. The governance of societies is drifting toward

the governance of irritation: who can tighten the psychic constriction, who can release it, and when. Anger management is no longer therapy; it is power.

Kayfabe Politics and the Government of Pretence

Contemporary politics increasingly resembles professional wrestling. This is not a metaphor of ridicule but a diagnosis of structure. In wrestling, the audience knows the fights are scripted, the heroes and villains rehearsed, the betrayals staged. Yet the spectacle works precisely because the audience consents to the fiction. They cheer the faces, boo the heels, and participate emotionally in a drama whose artificiality is openly acknowledged and yet affectively irresistible. This condition is called kayfabe: a system of organised pretence in which everyone knows the story is constructed but agrees to act as if it were real. Digital politics has absorbed this logic. Media no longer merely report events; they put people on. Marshall McLuhan used this phrase to describe the act of teasing, upsetting and irritating audiences in order to force them to notice the effects of media themselves. In kayfabe politics this provocation is no longer pedagogical. It becomes a governing technique. The public is not misled through hidden manipulation but is invited into a game in which outrage, indignation and moral panic are produced deliberately through the staging of villains who violate taboos, offend sacred values and transgress every norm. The stronger and more shameless the heel, the more intense the collective moral anger becomes. This anger is not collateral damage. It is the engine of the system. This transformation can be understood through the lens of second-degree cybernetics. Classical, first-order cybernetics is concerned with the external control of a system. The observer stands outside, correcting deviations through feedback. In second-degree cybernetics the observer is part of the system. The system observes itself observing. Peter Ayolov applies this distinction to contemporary governance. Digital power no longer operates primarily by imposing decisions. It operates by observing how publics observe narratives and then adjusting those narratives to intensify emotional participation. Governance therefore becomes the observation of observation. Media systems track not only what happens but how audiences react to how things are presented. Outrage metrics, engagement dashboards and algorithmic ranking systems do not measure truth; they measure intensity. The more people react, the more the narrative is repeated, amplified and refined. What matters is not policy but performance. Legitimacy is no longer anchored in effectiveness or coherence but in emotional charge. This is where kayfabe becomes a form of consensual pretence. Unlike classical propaganda, which depends on deception, kayfabe politics depends on participation. The audience recognises the theatricality of the spectacle but chooses to remain inside it because it provides meaning, excitement and identity. This creates a pseudo-reality in which the border between fiction and fact is less important than the emotional reality of the conflict. The public is not tricked into believing; it is recruited into performing belief. The system is self-sustaining. The more outrage a narrative generates, the more the system supplies similar narratives. Visibility replaces verification. The logic of second-degree governance is therefore circular. Moral anger becomes both the product and the input of political communication. The system does not aim to resolve conflict. It aims to reproduce it because conflict is the condition of its own continuation. In this environment, miscommunication and discommunication are not failures. They are design features. Kayfabe politics requires noise, contradiction and scandal. The heel must be constantly reinvented. He must offend new sacred objects, break new taboos and violate new expectations to keep the audience emotionally invested. Each violation triggers waves of indignation that reconfirm the identities of the spectators. To cheer the face is to become the face. To hate the

heel is to know who one is. This explains why contemporary politics is saturated with figures who appear to delight in outrage. Their role is not to govern but to perform transgression. Their power lies not in what they achieve but in what they provoke. They function as emotional generators whose scandals keep the system in motion while structural realities remain unexamined. Kayfabe politics therefore represents a merger of entertainment and governance. It is not simply that politics is becoming more theatrical. It is that theatre has become the mechanism of control. Manufactured dissent is no longer an unintended by-product of polarisation but a governing tool that locks publics into endless cycles of moral conflict. People are governed through their own reactions. In this sense, kayfabe is not deception. It is participation in one's own manipulation. The public sphere becomes a choreographed arena in which fiction routinely outcompetes fact, not because truth has vanished, but because the emotional game is more compelling than the reality it conceals.

Breaking the Sacred: Transgression as a System of Moral Unification

One of the central claims of Peter Ayolov's work on the planned obsolescence of communication is that contemporary media systems no longer aim to stabilise meaning, trust or shared values. Instead, they are structurally oriented toward rapid decay. Information is produced to expire quickly, language is designed to inflame rather than clarify, and outrage is not an accident but a commercial strategy. This argument is developed in The Economic Policy of Online Media: Manufacture of Dissent and in the wider framework of the planned obsolescence of language, where communication is treated as a disposable resource whose value lies in its capacity to generate conflict. This diagnosis converges in an unexpected way with a much earlier cultural critique: Michael Medved's 1992 book Hollywood vs. America. Medved famously described the entertainment industry as a 'poison factory' that systematically undermines traditional moral frameworks by promoting violence, sexual transgression, profanity and the ridicule of religion and family life. He argued that this was not simply a matter of artistic freedom or audience demand, but the result of an industry captured by its own ideological obsessions. Even when family-oriented films succeeded commercially, studios continued to prioritise material that shocked, offended and destabilised. At first glance, these two critiques seem to belong to different intellectual worlds: one to digital media theory, the other to cultural conservatism. Yet they converge on a crucial point. Both describe a system that deliberately breaks taboos, offends sacred objects and stages moral transgression as a way to organise collective attention. What Medved perceived as cultural sabotage, Ayolov reframes as a structural feature of communication in late modernity: transgression is not a deviation from the system but one of its organising principles. In the logic of planned obsolescence, meaning must constantly be renewed. Outrage has a short half-life. What scandalised yesterday is banal today. The system therefore requires ever more extreme violations to maintain attention. Language is not only accelerated; it is eroded. Each communicative cycle leaves behind informational debris, what Ayolov calls informational entropy. Shared vocabularies decay, trust in institutions weakens, and publics are left navigating a landscape of fragments, rumours and moral shocks. Here the notion of 'putting people on', borrowed from Marshall McLuhan, becomes central. To put people on is to tease, irritate and provoke them into awareness. In advertising, in entertainment and now in digital politics, this provocation is routinised. The audience is no longer simply informed or entertained. It is hurt slightly, morally or symbolically, so that it must react. This reaction is then captured, measured and monetised. Breaking taboos is therefore not only a cultural act but a cybernetic one. It creates a feedback

loop in which transgression generates outrage, outrage generates engagement, and engagement signals the system to intensify transgression. What Medved saw as a betrayal of public values is, in Ayolov's framework, a functional requirement of an attention economy driven by anger. The more sacred the object violated, the stronger the collective reaction, and the greater the visibility and profitability of the content. This is also why moral panic remains so resilient. Moral panic is not simply a social pathology; it is a unifying mechanism. When a society experiences rapid value erosion and institutional distrust, outrage offers a temporary substitute for solidarity. People may no longer agree on what is good, but they can still agree on what is evil. Deliberate transgression supplies the necessary enemy. It invites the public to coalesce around indignation. The paradox is that this unification is both real and hollow. It produces intense emotional alignment without durable commitment. Communities form through shared anger rather than shared responsibility. The result is a public sphere that appears morally mobilised while remaining structurally fragmented. Ayolov describes this condition as manufacture of dissent: a system that keeps societies in a state of perpetual moral agitation, ensuring that energy is spent on symbolic battles rather than on examining the deeper economic and political arrangements that generate instability. Hollywood vs. America documented this process in the analogue age. The digital environment universalises it. Platforms no longer need studios or editors to stage transgression. They outsource it to users, influencers and automated recommendation systems. The breaking of taboos becomes decentralised, continuous and global. What emerges is a regime of communication in which deliberate offence is a tool of governance. To destabilise values is to mobilise emotion. To mobilise emotion is to produce attention. To produce attention is to exercise power. Moral anger becomes the connective tissue of a system that cannot survive stability, because stability does not click. This chapter therefore frames moral outrage not as a moral failure of individuals but as a design feature of contemporary communication. The sacred is broken not to destroy society, but to bind it temporarily through fear, panic and indignation. In the planned obsolescence of communication, transgression is the currency of unity, and unity is purchased through anger.

The Timeline of Anger Management Culture

The history of moral anger is inseparable from the history of communication. Long before networks, platforms or algorithms, anger already served as a social technology for binding people together, marking boundaries, and mobilising loyalty. In tribal societies anger was regulated through proximity. Shame, honour and face-to-face sanction imposed limits on escalation. A person who lost control did so in front of others and was immediately accountable to them. Anger here was not yet abstract. It was embodied, ritualised and constrained by the social costs of presence. This is the first phase of the timeline: anger as a local moral force embedded in small, thick communities. With the rise of religious traditions, anger acquired a new grammar. It became righteous, pious and sacred. Moral outrage was no longer only a response to interpersonal harm but a defence of cosmic order. Anger could now be justified as obedience to divine law. This phase stabilised anger within doctrine and ritual, turning it into a moral resource capable of unifying believers across distance and time. Political formations inherited this model. Classical rhetoric and later revolutionary movements transformed anger into a public energy directed at injustice, tyranny and betrayal. Political anger became a tool of mobilisation, capable of forging imagined communities around shared resentment and hope. Printing introduced another decisive shift. It stabilised narratives of grievance and allowed resentment to be preserved, standardised and circulated. Nations learned to remember

collectively. Ideological anger was born, carried by pamphlets, newspapers and books that translated local grievances into national mythologies. Broadcast media intensified this dynamic. Radio and television synchronised emotion, allowing millions to feel anger at the same time toward the same objects. Outrage was industrialised. It could now be scheduled, framed and repeated on a mass scale, producing emotionally unified publics that did not need to meet in person to feel together. The internet marks the threshold at which this timeline breaks. Digital networks do not merely transmit anger. They re-engineer it. Moral anger becomes instantaneous, persistent and measurable. It is detached from bodily presence and immediate consequence, reappearing as fragments of language: titles, captions, hashtags, screenshots, comments and memes. This is the beginning of the second part of the timeline, where anger is no longer primarily a moral response but a manufactured resource. The older model of propaganda as the manufacturing of consent no longer describes this environment. What dominates is the manufacturing of moral anger. Online mass media and platform infrastructures are built around engagement metrics that privilege provocation. The economic policy of digital communication is simple: attention is scarce, outrage is abundant, and angry people click more. Algorithms reward intensity, not accuracy. Propaganda 2.0 therefore automates dissent. Moral anger is no longer injected into a passive audience; it is crowdsourced. Users comment, share, troll and remix, performing outrage as a form of productive labour that generates traffic, data and profit. This new phase of the timeline is characterised by linguistic triggers. The moral vocabulary of the network is compressed and portable. Certain phrases reliably recruit indignation, while others signal loyalty and belonging. Public discourse shifts from opinion to reaction. Facts lose persuasive force because they lack emotional velocity. What matters is not what happened but how it is framed. Anger becomes a skill, a style, and an asset for anyone seeking visibility. The final phase of the timeline is the emergence of moral outrage networks. Here anger ceases to be merely a circulating emotion and becomes infrastructure. Networked moral communities form through shared indignation rather than shared doctrine or experience. Hashtags and slogans replace tradition. Interpretation collapses under speed and anonymity. Moral publics no longer behave like deliberating communities but like swarms that assemble and dissolve around successive objects of outrage. In this civilisation of anger management, public life is reorganised around cycles of provocation and pacification. Outrage is alternately induced and subsided, not to resolve injustice but to regulate attention and loyalty. Miscommunication and discommunication become systemic. Moral anger produces misunderstanding as efficiently as it produces mobilisation, and democracy is transformed into perpetual moral theatre.

What is the future of collective morality?

The timeline of anger reveals a movement from proximity to infrastructure, from embodied emotion to network function. Moral anger once unified families, congregations and nations through ritual, doctrine and shared memory. Today it unifies strangers through algorithms and metrics. The future of collective morality will not be determined by those who define truth, but by those who control the circulation of indignation. In a world governed by anger management, power belongs to whoever can most effectively induce, channel and neutralise moral outrage.

The Seven Hypotheses of Moral Outrage Networks

The following hypotheses articulate the core theoretical claims of this book. Together they outline how moral anger has been transformed from a situational human emotion into a scalable social technology that structures communication, identity and power in the digital age.

Hypothesis I: **From Emotion to Linguistic Infrastructure**

A first hypothesis is that a new form and role of anger has emerged in online communication and global mass media, in which moral anger is increasingly produced as a linguistic and networked phenomenon rather than as an individual, situational emotion grounded in local experience.

Hypothesis II: **Why Feelings Defeat Facts**

A second hypothesis is that moral anger works with unusual consistency in digital environments because, within language and its online representations, facts matter less than the feelings created by words, and effective audience-building therefore depends on the capacity to induce righteous moral anger through titles, captions, posts, comments, and repeated framings.

Hypothesis III: **Anger as the Engine of Collective Belonging**

A third hypothesis is that moral anger is now used openly as a technique for creating communal feeling and consolidating group identity, despite official ideologies warning against hate speech and intolerance, because repeated moral narratives and repeated outrage cues can create the masses that sustain visibility, mobilisation, and influence, while wisdom and factual complexity rarely generate comparable collective force, which is why anger still works.

Hypothesis IV: **Scale, Complexity and the Rise of Urban Moral Rage**

A fourth hypothesis is that moral anger grows in direct proportion to the scale of society, the density of urban life, and the complexity of political, cultural and value systems, so that as populations concentrate in megacities and interact through abstract institutional languages, anger increasingly replaces intimacy as the primary form of moral coordination.

Hypothesis V: **The Age of Anger Management Governance**

A fifth hypothesis is that modern government and platform governance converge into a regime of anger management, in which collective moral anger is alternately stimulated and pacified in large, dispersed publics, making the administration of outrage a routine technique of political stability as well as disruption.

Hypothesis VI: **From Private Feeling to Circulating Collective Affect**

A sixth hypothesis is that in networked environments moral anger is no longer predominantly an individual emotion but a collective one that circulates through social media and online mass communication, where cycles of induction and subsidence function as mechanisms for regulating identity, loyalty and perceived injustice.

Hypothesis VII: **Identity Through Indignation**

A seventh hypothesis is that in societies with unstable values and fleeting moral reference points, personal identity is increasingly constructed through displays of moral anger, so that to be someone in the online public sphere is to signal what provokes indignation, often through

slogans, profile symbols or performative outrage that operate as banal activism or clicktivism rather than sustained moral commitment.

The Architecture of Indignation

Manufacturing moral anger describes a structural transformation of public life in which indignation is no longer primarily an intimate reaction to injustice but a scalable linguistic infrastructure embedded in networked communication. As societies expand, cities grow denser, and political and cultural systems become more complex, moral anger increasingly replaces proximity, trust and shared experience as the dominant form of moral coordination. Digital platforms convert this anger into a circulating collective affect, alternately amplifying and pacifying it through cycles of visibility, silence and renewed provocation, creating an emergent regime of anger management that now characterises both platform governance and political authority. In this environment, identity is no longer stabilised through tradition or durable values but through public performances of indignation, where slogans, profile symbols and ritualised outrage function as substitutes for belonging. Moral anger therefore no longer merely expresses conflict; it produces communities, regulates loyalty, and supplies the emotional energy that sustains attention economies. What once appeared as righteous moral reaction now operates as a communicative technology, binding vast, dispersed populations into fleeting moral collectives, confirming that in contemporary mass societies it is not knowledge or reflection that mobilise crowds most effectively, but the engineered circulation of anger.

2. The Sociology of Anger

> *'My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste. Anger is loaded with information and energy.'*
>
> *Audre Lorde, The Uses of Anger (1981)*

2.1. Anger

What is Anger?

Anger is commonly described[11] as an intense emotional reaction to perceived provocation, threat or injustice, but in the context of digital societies it is no longer merely a private feeling. It has become a social signal, a behavioural currency and a programmable resource circulating through platforms, interfaces and metrics. Physiologically, anger still manifests through increased heart rate, blood pressure and stress hormones, and it remains linked to the ancient fight-or-flight response. Yet these bodily reactions are now increasingly triggered not by immediate physical danger but by symbolic cues delivered through screens: headlines, notifications, algorithmic prompts and moral framings that signal outrage as an appropriate reaction. Classical psychology treats anger as a normal and sometimes functional emotion that mobilises energy, sharpens focus and motivates corrective action. In small communities, anger historically operated as a mechanism of boundary-keeping, signalling violation and demanding redress. Digital communication networks have radically altered this ecology. Anger is no longer episodic but ambient. It is constantly reactivated, amplified and monetised through endless

[11] LeDoux, J. (1996) The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life. New York: Simon & Schuster.

cycles of exposure, response and feedback. What once required direct confrontation now unfolds at scale, across dispersed audiences who share neither space nor responsibility yet synchronise emotionally through platforms. Psychologists distinguish between hasty anger linked to immediate threat, settled anger arising from perceived injustice, and dispositional anger rooted in character traits. Online environments collapse these distinctions. Sudden irritation becomes settled grievance within minutes, while dispositional irritability is rewarded with visibility, followers and engagement. In this sense anger is no longer simply expressed; it is cultivated. It acquires performative value, functioning as proof of moral alignment within networked communities. To be angry publicly is to demonstrate belonging, to display sensitivity to violation and to mark one's position in an ongoing moral drama. Neuropsychological research shows that anger is associated with activation in the salience network, the amygdala and stress-response systems. Digital interfaces are designed to stimulate precisely these circuits. Notifications, visual cues and emotionally charged language are optimised to trigger autonomic arousal, pulling users into cycles of reaction before reflective appraisal can intervene. The result is a chronic state of low-grade threat perception in which the brain is trained to scan for offence, outrage and symbolic enemies. Anger is described as comprising cognitive appraisals, somatic-affective tension and behavioural response. Platform architectures exploit all three modalities simultaneously. Cognitively, users are primed through framing devices that define what counts as a transgression. Somatically, constant alerts and immersive feeds maintain physiological arousal. Behaviourally, reaction is reduced to a small repertoire of clicks, shares and comments that convert emotion into measurable data. Anger thus migrates from the realm of lived experience into the realm of infrastructure. The traditional distinction between anger and aggression also erodes online. While anger is not identical with aggression, network environments blur the boundary by rewarding antagonism, mockery and symbolic violence with reach and algorithmic amplification. Rage becomes raw, undifferentiated affect, spilling into public space whenever the next provocation exceeds the user's capacity to process meaningfully. In this condition anger ceases to function as a corrective force and instead becomes an addictive cycle of arousal and release. The typologies of passive, aggressive and assertive anger appear increasingly inadequate. Passive anger today manifests not in silence but in ironic detachment, performative apathy or strategic withdrawal from debate, often accompanied by background resentment stored for later mobilisation. Aggressive anger becomes content: insults, pile-ons and viral denunciations that travel faster than explanation. Assertive anger, historically associated with boundary-setting and proportionate response, struggles to survive in systems calibrated for intensity rather than deliberation. Cultural research once explored how anger differed across societies. In global networks these differences are flattened into a common grammar of outrage. Expression is standardised through memes, hashtags and templates of moral accusation. Individuals no longer learn anger primarily within families or local communities but through exposure to trending conflicts and mediated moral scripts. Anger becomes a lingua franca of digital life. The causes of anger are also transformed. People still report feeling angry when expectations are violated or when responsibility is attributed to others. Yet in online environments causality itself becomes ambiguous. Provocations are decontextualised, temporally dislocated and morally pre-packaged. Users are rarely confronted with the full chain of events that produce outrage, only with fragments optimised for reaction. Anger appears to have an external cause, but in reality it is often the product of residual affect carried across threads, days and platforms, embedded within a persistent background of moral disturbance. In networked societies, anger is no longer simply an emotion to be managed. It is a structural condition, a mode of social coordination and

a central mechanism through which attention, identity and power are organised. Understanding anger today therefore requires moving beyond individual psychology to the sociology of digital systems that manufacture, circulate and normalise it as the dominant affect of public life. Digital anger is a networked social technology that is engineered, amplified and monetised through digital communication systems to organise attention, identity and power.

Cognitive effects of anger

Anger profoundly alters cognition[12], not simply by narrowing attention but by reshaping how reality itself is interpreted. In the context of digital communication, these cognitive effects are no longer confined to individual psychology; they become socially consequential, scalable and economically exploitable. Anger reduces the accuracy with which external stimuli are processed, creating a distorted perception of risk, responsibility and probability. Threats appear less dangerous, actions seem more justified, and outcomes are judged as more likely to succeed. This cognitive shift helps explain why anger is so effective as a driver of impulsive decisions, moral certainty and political mobilisation in networked environments. Empirical research shows that angry individuals consistently underestimate risks and overestimate personal advantage. This distortion extends beyond the immediate present into retrospective judgement. Events that once felt dangerous or uncertain are later remembered as having been manageable or exaggerated. Within digital outrage cycles, this produces a self-reinforcing illusion of clarity and foresight: anger retrospectively validates itself. Once outrage has passed, the subject remembers not confusion but conviction. This makes anger uniquely resistant to correction, because its cognitive after-effects rewrite memory in its own favour. Anger also alters how social groups are perceived. In intergroup contexts, anger intensifies negative stereotyping and reduces trust toward perceived outsiders. Moral boundaries harden, nuance dissolves and attribution becomes increasingly dispositional rather than situational. Behaviour is explained by presumed character rather than circumstance. This correspondence bias is crucial for understanding digital polarisation. Anger encourages the belief that opponents act not from error, constraint or complexity but from moral defect. Unlike fear or sadness, which often promote caution or reflection, anger simplifies social reality into clear categories of blame. These effects are magnified by networked communication. Platforms reward fast judgements, not slow interpretation. Anger aligns perfectly with this environment because it reduces cognitive load. It narrows attention to offence, violation and antagonism while excluding competing negative information that does not sustain outrage. In this sense anger is cognitively efficient. It filters complexity, prioritises emotionally congruent information and sustains engagement by continuously anticipating further provocations. Angry individuals are more likely to expect future anger-causing events and to interpret ambiguous signals as confirmation of threat or hostility. This anticipatory dimension of anger is particularly significant in digital systems driven by prediction. Algorithms trained on engagement learn that angry users are reliable: their behaviour is more predictable, their reactions faster, their attention easier to retain. Anger thus becomes not only a psychological state but a behavioural profile. Cognitive narrowing makes individuals more susceptible to targeted messaging, especially when content mirrors the emotional tone already present. Persuasion becomes less about evidence and more about emotional congruence. Messages that match anger are processed more fluently,

[12] Lerner, J.S. and Tiedens, L.Z. (2006) ‘Portrait of the angry decision maker’, Journal of Behavioral Decision Making, 19(2), pp. 115–137.

remembered more easily and acted upon more readily than messages that appeal to sadness, caution or empathy. Anger also intensifies desire. Research suggests[13] that when anger is activated, objects associated with that emotion become more desirable, even when they are otherwise neutral. In digital environments this translates into heightened attachment to symbolic objects such as slogans, hashtags, leaders or causes. Anger binds cognition to possession, identity and loyalty. The angry subject does not merely oppose; they cling. This helps explain why outrage-driven movements often display strong affective attachment to symbols and narratives, even when their practical outcomes remain vague or counterproductive. The expressive dimension of anger further amplifies its cognitive effects. Displayed anger is widely perceived as a signal of power, competence and status. Individuals who express anger are often judged as more dominant, more decisive and more legitimate, particularly in competitive or conflictual settings. In digital spaces where visibility functions as authority, anger becomes a shortcut to perceived influence. Cognitive bias operates on both sides: those expressing anger feel more justified and those observing it are more likely to defer, concede or align. Attempts to manage or suppress anger traditionally focus on individual regulation through therapy, coping strategies or medication. While these approaches may mitigate personal harm, they overlook the structural conditions that continuously provoke and reward anger. Suppression within such systems often leads not to resolution but to displacement, accumulation and sudden release. Anger denied expression does not disappear; it migrates, seeking alternative targets or erupting unpredictably when thresholds are crossed. In organisational and social contexts, anger has long been understood as producing both constructive and destructive outcomes depending on norms of expression. Digital networks collapse these thresholds. Expression is immediate, global and often detached from accountability. Impropriety is difficult to enforce, while suppression is invisibly incentivised through shadow banning, algorithmic dampening or reputational risk. The result is a volatile equilibrium in which anger is constantly stimulated yet unevenly constrained. Within this book, the cognitive effects of anger are not treated as individual deficits but as systemic features of digital societies. Anger reshapes perception, memory, judgement and expectation in ways that align seamlessly with the architectures of online communication. It is precisely this cognitive reconfiguration that allows anger to function as the central affective infrastructure of contemporary public life.

Philosophical perspectives of anger

Philosophical reflection on anger[14] has always revolved around a central tension: whether anger is a dangerous loss of reason or a necessary force for moral and political action. From antiquity onward, thinkers recognised that anger is not merely an emotion but a judgement about the world, tied to ideas of injustice, dignity and power. This ambivalence remains crucial for understanding anger in contemporary digital societies, where ancient moral debates are replayed within radically transformed communicative conditions. In ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, uncontrolled anger was often treated as a form of madness. Seneca famously rejected anger as useless, even in war, arguing that discipline and rational control were superior to fury. For him, anger clouded judgement, disrupted social order and undermined self-mastery.

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[13] Novaco, R.W. (1975) Anger Control: The Development and Evaluation of an Experimental Treatment. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

[14] Haidt, J. (2003) 'The moral emotions', in Davidson, R.J., Scherer, K.R. and Goldsmith, H.H. (eds.) Handbook of Affective Sciences. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 852–870.

This suspicion of anger reflected a broader elite concern with hierarchy and control, particularly in societies structured by slavery, where anger was seen as a destabilising force among both masters and subordinates. Anger threatened order because it blurred distinctions between command and impulse. Aristotle offered a more ambivalent account. While condemning excess, he attributed value to anger that arose in response to injustice. Without anger, Aristotle argued, moral sensibility itself would collapse into indifference. To be incapable of anger was not virtue but insensibility. This distinction between justified and unjustified anger established a framework that would persist for centuries: anger could be legitimate if proportionate, directed at the right object and governed by reason. Already, anger appeared as a moral technology, capable of correcting wrongs but prone to corruption. Classical control strategies focused on self-discipline, habituation and early education. Seneca proposed techniques for preventing anger, stopping it once aroused and managing it in others. These methods assumed a slow moral world: anger unfolded within face-to-face relations, where time for reflection remained possible. Galen extended this view by emphasising mentorship and guided self-regulation. Importantly, both saw anger as malleable, especially in childhood, reinforcing the idea that emotional control was a civic virtue rather than a private preference. Medieval philosophy largely inherited these frameworks, embedding anger within theological and humoral systems. Anger was associated with excess choler and treated as both a moral failing and a physiological imbalance. Thinkers such as Aquinas preserved Aristotle's distinction between justified and sinful anger, arguing that anger directed toward injustice could serve the stability of law and teaching. Yet wrath was also classified as a deadly sin when it fractured social harmony. Anger thus occupied a paradoxical position: necessary for justice, dangerous for order. Gendered interpretations of anger during this period further revealed its political function. Men were commonly associated with choleric heat, activity and dominance, while women were described as phlegmatic, passive and submissive. Anger was coded as masculine, tied to authority and action. Female anger, when acknowledged at all, appeared as deviation or disorder. These philosophical constructions did not merely describe emotion; they regulated who was permitted to express anger and under what conditions. Anger was already a technology of power distribution. Early medical and philosophical approaches treated uncontrollable anger as illness. Maimonides and Avicenna framed excessive anger as a condition requiring guidance and treatment, linking emotional imbalance to cognitive disturbance. Yet thinkers such as al-Ghazali emphasised balance rather than suppression, arguing that anger must be governed, not eliminated. The soul's powers required calibration, not erasure. This concern with moderation foreshadowed later psychological models, though still embedded in moral cosmologies rather than empirical systems. Modern philosophy complicates these inherited positions. Kant rejected revenge as morally corrosive, while Hume argued that the absence of anger could signal weakness rather than virtue. Contemporary philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum maintain scepticism toward anger's moral reliability, warning that even justified anger easily slips into narcissism and cruelty. At the same time, feminist and critical theorists have challenged the unequal distribution of anger's legitimacy. Anger, they argue, has historically been denied to women and minorities, whose expressions of outrage are more readily pathologised or punished. These debates converge in the digital present. The philosophical question is no longer simply whether anger is justified, but how anger is structured, amplified and instrumentalised by communication systems. Anger today is detached from deliberation and embedded in infrastructures that reward immediacy, intensity and moral certainty. Ancient techniques of self-control presupposed temporal distance and personal responsibility; digital networks collapse both. Anger circulates faster than reflection and is judged less by its justice than by its

engagement metrics. Within this book, philosophical perspectives on anger are not treated as abstract history but as diagnostic tools. They reveal how anger has always functioned as a moral judgement bound to power, legitimacy and social order. What has changed is not the nature of anger itself but the environment in which it operates. Digital networks transform an ancient moral problem into a structural condition, making anger not merely a response to injustice but a central organising principle of contemporary public life.

Religious perspectives of anger

Religious traditions have rarely treated anger as a merely private emotion. Anger[15] is typically framed as a spiritual problem, a moral test, or a force that must be disciplined because it can reorganise relationships, fracture communities and deform judgement. In the contemporary environment of digital communication, these religious perspectives acquire renewed relevance, because moral anger has become one of the main fuels of collective belonging and conflict. Religious ethics were often built to govern anger inside communities that depended on face-to-face trust, shared rituals and slow moral accountability. Networked publics reverse these conditions, turning anger into a broadcast signal, a status display and a mechanism of mobilisation. In Judaism, anger is frequently presented as a dangerous trait, not because indignation is unintelligible, but because uncontrolled wrath threatens covenantal order. Scriptural condemnations treat fierce anger as cruel and socially corrosive, and rabbinic ethics praise restraint as a form of strength. The emphasis is not on denying outrage as such, but on mastering the impulse that transforms moral perception into vengeance. The warning against anger as a kind of idolatry extends this logic: when anger becomes absolute, it replaces providence with the self's interpretation of events. In that sense, anger does not merely react; it enthrones itself as a rival authority. For a book concerned with digital anger, this point is structurally important: outrage online often functions as a quasi-sacred certainty, a moral lens that refuses contingency, context and limitation. The religious critique identifies anger's capacity to become an alternative god, demanding loyalty and ritual repetition. Christianity displays a similar tension between condemning wrath and acknowledging forms of righteous anger. Catholic moral teaching distinguishes anger as a passion from wrath as a sin. Anger becomes spiritually destructive when it hardens into hatred, seeks excessive punishment, or targets the innocent. The tradition therefore develops a model of thresholds: there is a boundary between moral protest and corrosive fixation. In networked culture, where anger is constantly kept 'on' through feeds and prompts, this threshold logic helps explain why outrage spirals so easily into cruelty. The distinction between anger and hatred is particularly relevant, because digital systems routinely convert episodic indignation into durable hostility through repetition, memory and identity formation. Yet Christian thought also contains a countercurrent that treats expressed anger, even anger toward God, as spiritually honest rather than sinful. Pastoral writers argue that suppressed anger can become alienation and that direct expression can deepen relationship, because it refuses false piety. Biblical narratives of protest, lament and accusation demonstrate that anger can be part of faith, not its negation. This is important for understanding how moral anger operates as a claim to truth and intimacy. Digital outrage often borrows the tone of prophetic denunciation, but without the stabilising frame of penitence, self-implication or communal repair. The older religious forms demanded that anger remain tied to humility, confession and responsibility, whereas online anger is frequently untethered from

[15] Frank, R.H. (1988) Passions Within Reason: The Strategic Role of the Emotions. New York: W. W. Norton.

reconciliation. Hindu traditions often interpret anger through the dynamics of desire, frustration and bondage. Anger is linked to unfulfilled attachment and the perception of obstruction. This framing matters because digital systems are engineered around micro-desires: recognition, affirmation, dominance in argument, the satisfaction of being seen as right. When these desires are frustrated, anger emerges as the predictable emotional output of a competitive attention economy. The warning that anger carries a particular destructive power is compatible with the book's concern that digital infrastructures multiply frustration and manufacture chronic agitation. Anger becomes not only a response to wrongdoing but an artefact of repeated obstruction: being ignored, being contradicted, losing status, or failing to control the narrative. Buddhism tends to treat anger as an intensified form of aversion, a mental poison that distorts perception and generates suffering. The emphasis falls on the inner origin of the problem: external events are not, by themselves, the cause of suffering; the mind's reaction produces the experience as a problem. This perspective is not simply therapeutic; it is sociological in the present context. Digital communication externalises blame while internalising agitation. It trains attention to scan for offence, to interpret disagreement as threat, and to rehearse resentment. Buddhist approaches insist that anger is not light, clarity or courage, but a darkness that reduces insight. For the chapter's purposes, this framing clarifies why anger is so compatible with algorithmic systems: it is attention-grabbing, self-reinforcing and resistant to reflective interruption. Islam strongly values restraint of anger and often links anger to satanic provocation, arrogance or excessive ambition. The ethical ideal is not weakness but control: anger is treated as a gateway vice that opens the door to other moral failures. Practical techniques for diminishing anger, such as changing posture, seeking refuge in prayer, or performing ablution, treat anger as embodied and contagious. In a networked environment, where anger travels at speed and is repeatedly triggered, this tradition's emphasis on interruption is striking. The question becomes less 'what is a correct opinion?' and more 'how is the cycle broken before it becomes harm?' Across many religions, anger is also attributed to God as divine retribution against evil. This motif highlights another structural problem in digital outrage: human anger frequently imitates divine judgement. Online denunciation often adopts the tone of final verdict, as if moral certainty grants the right to punish. Religious traditions typically balance divine wrath with divine mercy, or at least situate judgement within a cosmic order beyond human ego. Digital publics, by contrast, often collapse judgement into immediate collective action, producing moral theatre without transcendent restraint. Taken together, religious perspectives treat anger as spiritually significant because it reorganises perception, community and authority. For a sociology of digital anger, the enduring lesson is that anger is never only felt; it is governed, licensed, ritualised and directed. The modern problem is that platforms now perform this governance, turning moral anger into an infrastructure of belonging, conflict and profit.

Rage as engineered condition

Rage[16] represents the extreme end of anger, a state in which indignation intensifies into loss of restraint, perceptual narrowing and moral absolutism. It is not simply stronger anger but a qualitative shift in how reality is apprehended and acted upon. Within the framework of this book, rage is best understood not as a rare pathological eruption but as a structurally produced condition that digital communication systems increasingly invite, amplify and normalise. Rage

[16] Barbalet, J.M. (2001) Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

is what anger becomes when it is continuously stimulated, socially rewarded and detached from limits of proportion, context and responsibility. Historically, the very language of rage associates it with madness, frenzy and loss of control. Its etymology links rage to rabies, raving and violent excess, whether in humans, animals or natural forces such as storms and fire. This semantic field already suggests that rage is perceived as something that overtakes the subject rather than something consciously chosen. In digital environments, this loss of agency is not accidental. Rage is cultivated through design features that accelerate emotional escalation while inhibiting reflection. What once emerged under exceptional threat now appears as a routine affective response to symbolic provocation. At the physiological level, rage involves massive activation of stress and arousal systems. Adrenaline floods the body, pain perception dulls, attention narrows and action feels urgent and justified. Time may appear distorted, with events experienced as either slowed or compressed. These embodied effects are evolutionarily ancient, oriented toward immediate survival. The sociological problem arises when these mechanisms are repeatedly triggered in environments where no immediate physical danger exists. Digital rage is therefore a misfiring of ancient survival circuits within symbolic, mediated conflicts that have no natural endpoint. Cognitively, rage radically impairs judgement. Rational evaluation gives way to tunnel vision focused exclusively on the perceived source of offence. Nuance collapses, alternatives disappear and moral certainty becomes absolute. In this state, actions that would otherwise seem disproportionate or destructive feel necessary and even virtuous. This cognitive distortion is central to the political and cultural power of rage. It transforms interpretation into verdict and disagreement into existential threat. In networked publics, rage does not merely distort individual cognition; it synchronises it across groups, producing collective states of moral intoxication. Digital systems are uniquely effective at sustaining this condition. Algorithms privilege content that provokes intense reaction, and rage reliably delivers attention, engagement and repetition. Each cycle of exposure reinforces arousal, while memory is selectively encoded to confirm the legitimacy of outrage. Rage thus acquires narrative continuity. It is no longer a moment but an identity. Individuals and groups come to define themselves through what enrages them, whom they oppose and which transgressions must never be forgiven. Rage becomes a durable moral posture rather than a transient emotional episode. Health research traditionally treats rage as harmful, associating it with anxiety, depression, cardiovascular stress and psychosomatic illness. These findings remain valid but incomplete. The distinctive feature of contemporary rage is not only its physiological cost but its social productivity. Rage is useful. It mobilises attention, cements group cohesion and simplifies complex realities into emotionally legible stories. This utility explains why rage is increasingly channelled rather than treated, encouraged rather than resolved. Therapeutic models aimed at individual regulation struggle to address systems that structurally reward dysregulation. Psychological debates about whether rage is impulsive or calculated reveal another important distinction. While rage is often associated with loss of control, some of its most destructive manifestations involve planning, rehearsal and ideological fixation. This suggests that rage can coexist with strategic rationality. In such cases, rage functions less as a momentary breakdown and more as a sustained affective orientation toward the world. Digital cultures blur the line between impulsive and instrumental rage by providing constant rehearsal through feeds, comments and symbolic reinforcement. Rage is frequently triggered by perceived threats to identity, status or deeply held beliefs. In digital societies, these threats are omnipresent. Metrics of visibility, affirmation and influence render status continuously measurable and perpetually unstable. Every contradiction, correction or loss of attention can be experienced as symbolic injury. Rage becomes a defence against perceived erasure. It promises

restoration of dignity through attack, denunciation or destruction of the offending object. Within Moral Outrage Networks, rage marks the point at which anger fully aligns with infrastructure. It is anger optimised for scale, speed and persistence. Rage is not merely expressed; it is circulated, archived and monetised. It is converted into clicks, followers and symbolic capital. What appears as personal loss of control is often the predictable outcome of systems designed to reward extremity. Understanding rage, therefore, requires moving beyond clinical or moral condemnation. Rage is not simply a failure of character or reason. It is a social condition produced at the intersection of ancient neurobiology and modern communication technologies. In the digital age, rage is no longer an exception. It is an outcome.

Outrage as moral spectacle

Outrage[17] is a moralised form of anger, shaped by the perception that a boundary has been crossed and that what has occurred lies 'beyond' what can be tolerated. Its etymological roots already signal this excess, pointing to transgression rather than mere disagreement. In contrast to anger, which can remain private or situational, outrage is inherently public. It demands recognition, witnesses and response. Within the framework of this book, outrage is not simply an emotion but a social mechanism that translates moral judgement into collective alignment, punishment and spectacle. Outrage typically combines surprise, disgust and anger into a single affective response. It is triggered not only by harm but by the sense that harm violates a shared moral order. This distinguishes outrage from fear or sadness. Outrage insists that something should not have happened and that someone must be held accountable. It therefore carries an implicit call to action, whether in the form of condemnation, shaming or exclusion. In pre-digital societies, outrage circulated within relatively bounded communities, where moral judgement was constrained by proximity, reputation and long-term accountability. Digital networks radically alter these conditions. Moral outrage[18], as a subset of outrage, is anchored in claims about justice. It frames events as wrongs that offend collective values rather than personal interests. This gives outrage its rhetorical power. To express outrage is to position oneself as a defender of norms and a representative of the moral community. However, this same structure makes outrage highly susceptible to instrumentalisation. Once outrage becomes a public signal of virtue and belonging, it can be detached from sustained ethical commitment and repurposed as performance. The contemporary digital environment has produced what is often described as faux or manufactured outrage. This does not mean that the emotion is necessarily insincere, but that its expression is increasingly shaped by incentives unrelated to redress or repair. Platforms reward outrage because it is contagious, polarising and measurable. Displays of concern are often selective, episodic and strategically aligned with visibility, status or factional advantage. Outrage becomes less about the victim or the wrong and more about the moral positioning of the speaker. Sociological analyses of faux outrage highlight a central paradox. Certain victims become 'preferred', canonised as symbols around which outrage can be safely and profitably organised, while others remain marginal, ignored or instrumentalised. Those whose suffering anchors public outrage often lack agency over how their experience is framed, circulated or exploited. Moral outrage thus risks reproducing power asymmetries rather than challenging them. The outrage economy speaks in the name of victims while frequently

[17] Haidt, J. (2012) The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion. New York: Pantheon.
[18] Sunstein, C.R. (2009) Going to Extremes: How Like Minds Unite and Divide. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

sidelining their actual needs, voices and long-term interests. This dynamic is particularly visible in competitive public spheres, where outrage functions as a scarce resource. Actors compete to be the first, loudest or most morally emphatic in their condemnation. As outrage escalates, attention shifts away from the original harm toward the performance of indignation itself. Moral language becomes exaggerated, absolutist and ritualised. The wrong must be framed as unprecedented, unforgivable and emblematic of deeper corruption. This escalation sustains engagement but erodes proportionality. Anthropological observations suggest that outrage is often culturally scripted. Certain societies cultivate styles of indignation that are both predictable and socially enjoyable. Outrage can become a form of collective entertainment, a way of affirming shared norms through ritualised shock. Digital media amplify this tendency by standardising the forms through which outrage is expressed: hashtags, memes, denunciations and calls for cancellation. The feeling may be genuine, but its expression follows templates that encourage repetition rather than resolution. Literary and historical examples of outrage often emphasise reciprocity and retaliation. To suffer outrage is to demand that outrage be returned. This logic underpins cycles of moral escalation in digital spaces, where condemnation invites counter-condemnation and every accusation generates a response. Outrage thus becomes self-perpetuating. Each round confirms the righteousness of the outraged and the villainy of the accused, leaving little room for explanation, repair or forgiveness. Within Moral Outrage Networks, outrage is treated as a key affective infrastructure of digital societies. It links individual emotion to collective action, moral judgement to visibility, and ethical language to economic value. Outrage is not merely expressed; it is circulated, amplified and archived. It becomes part of personal identity and group memory. The danger lies not in caring about injustice, but in the transformation of outrage into a standing emotional posture, permanently activated and continuously monetised. Understanding outrage in this context requires moving beyond the question of sincerity. The critical issue is structural. Outrage today operates within systems that reward intensity over understanding, immediacy over reflection and punishment over repair. As a result, outrage increasingly functions less as a response to injustice and more as a mode of participation in public life.

2.2. Why Anger exists?

An alarm system?

This section draws on the evolutionary work[19] of Aaron Sell, John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, who reconceptualise anger not as a loss of control but as a strategic social emotion shaped by natural selection. In their 2009 article, they argue that anger functions as a bargaining mechanism that evolved to recalibrate how much others value one's welfare in situations of conflict or exploitation. Sell's subsequent 2011 paper[20] formalises this insight into a recalibrational theory of anger, showing how anger is triggered when perceived welfare tradeoff ratios fall below an acceptable threshold, motivating confrontational or coercive responses to restore balance. Anger exists because it has long functioned as a reliable internal alarm system[21], alerting humans to threat, violation and imbalance. Far from being a defect, anger is

[19] Sell, A., Tooby, J. and Cosmides, L. (2009) 'Formidability and the logic of human anger', Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 106(35), pp. 15073–15078.
[20] Sell, A. (2011) 'The recalibrational theory and violent anger', Aggression and Violent Behavior, 16(5), pp. 381–389.
[21] Cannon, W.B. (1932) The Wisdom of the Body. New York: W. W. Norton.

one of the oldest affective mechanisms in human evolution, shaped to protect bodies, relationships and social position. In the context of this book, anger is approached not as a moral failure or psychological glitch, but as a functional response whose original purpose has been radically transformed by digital communication systems. At its biological core, anger is part of the fight response. When a threat is perceived, the brain initiates a rapid cascade of physiological changes: adrenaline surges, heart rate accelerates, blood is redirected toward large muscles and sensitivity to pain diminishes. The body is prepared for confrontation rather than retreat. Anger suppresses hesitation and fear, allowing decisive action in situations where withdrawal would mean loss, injury or death. This mechanism evolved in environments where danger was immediate, physical and short-lived. The alarm sounded, action followed, and resolution arrived quickly. As human societies became more complex, anger adapted to social rather than purely physical threats. Evolutionary perspectives describe anger as a bargaining mechanism that regulates cooperation. Anger is triggered when an individual perceives that another person is undervaluing their wellbeing or violating an implicit social contract. In this sense, anger functions as a signal demanding recalibration. It communicates that the current balance of costs and benefits is unacceptable and that change is required. Anger therefore plays a role in maintaining fairness, reciprocity and mutual recognition within groups. This social function explains anger's close relationship to boundaries. Anger marks the moment when a line has been crossed, when a norm has been breached or when dignity is threatened. It tells others that certain behaviours carry consequences. In small-scale communities, this signalling helped stabilise cooperation and deter exploitation. Importantly, anger's effectiveness depended on its episodic nature. It was not meant to be constant. An alarm that never stops loses its meaning and its authority. Anger also contributes to motivation and goal pursuit. It is an approach-oriented emotion, directing energy toward obstacles rather than away from them. When goals are blocked, anger provides focus, persistence and intensity. Frustration is converted into force. At the collective level, this dynamic becomes moral anger. Shared indignation over injustice has historically driven resistance, reform and social transformation. Anger has therefore played a role in challenging domination and correcting structural wrongs, particularly when other channels of influence were closed. Another key function of anger lies in communication and status. Displays of anger evolved as signals of strength, resolve and readiness to escalate. Facial expressions, posture and tone of voice communicate that an individual is not passive or easily dominated. In many social contexts, controlled expressions of anger have been associated with authority and competence. Anger signals that one expects to be taken seriously. This signalling function remains powerful even when detached from physical confrontation. The problem emerges when an alarm system designed for rare, high-stakes situations becomes chronically activated. Modern digital environments continuously stimulate anger while removing its natural resolution mechanisms. Threats are no longer immediate or solvable. They are symbolic, abstract and endlessly reproduced. Headlines, notifications and algorithmic amplification keep the anger response activated without allowing closure. The reflective capacities of the mind are repeatedly bypassed in favour of rapid emotional reaction. Under these conditions, anger shifts from an adaptive signal to a background state. What once recalibrated social relations now distorts them. Anger ceases to negotiate and begins to accumulate. Judgement narrows, empathy declines and identity becomes organised around permanent grievance. The alarm no longer points to a specific danger; it defines the world itself as hostile. This transformation lies at the centre of the sociology of digital anger. Platforms do not merely host anger; they are structurally aligned with its alarm properties. Anger captures attention, sustains engagement and produces

predictable behavioural patterns. What evolved to protect humans is repurposed into an infrastructure of visibility, identity and power. Anger exists because it once kept humans alive and socially integrated. It persists today because digital systems have learned to keep the alarm permanently switched on.

Did Anger Make Us Happy?

This section draws primarily on Kevin Bennett's article[22] 'Did Anger Evolve to Make Us Happy?' (2024) and the recalibration theory of anger developed by Aaron Sell and colleagues, which reframes anger as an evolved social adaptation rather than a purely destructive impulse. Anger is commonly treated as a problem to be managed or suppressed, especially in modern societies where it is associated with aggression, conflict and social breakdown. Yet evolutionary psychology proposes a different starting point. Anger did not emerge by accident, nor did it survive millions of years of human evolution because it made people miserable. It persisted because it performed a function. The recalibration theory of anger argues that anger evolved as a social mechanism designed to promote fairness, discourage exploitation and renegotiate one's position within social hierarchies. In this model, anger functions as an internal signal that something has gone wrong in the balance between individuals. It is triggered when a person perceives that others are undervaluing their interests, ignoring their boundaries or violating shared norms. Rather than being random or irrational, anger communicates a demand for recalibration. It announces that the current arrangement is unacceptable and that corrective action is required. The threat implicit in anger is not necessarily violence, but the withdrawal of cooperation, reputational damage or escalation of conflict if conditions do not change. This perspective reframes anger as a strategic emotion. It mobilises physiological energy, sharpens attention and focuses motivation on confronting the source of perceived injustice. Anger is therefore an approach-oriented emotion, pushing individuals toward action rather than retreat. From an evolutionary standpoint, this made sense in small-scale societies where cooperation was essential but always vulnerable to free-riding and domination. Anger helped regulate these social exchanges by imposing costs on those who violated expectations of fairness. The recalibration theory also highlights individual variation. People differ in what researchers call recalibration sensitivity, meaning the threshold at which anger is triggered. Some individuals react strongly to minor slights, while others tolerate significant violations before becoming angry. These differences are shaped by genetic predispositions, personal history and cultural norms. What counts as an insult, an injustice or an unacceptable imbalance is never purely biological. It is interpreted through social meaning. This emphasis on social context is crucial for understanding anger in contemporary digital societies. Online environments dramatically amplify the recalibration function of anger while stripping it of its natural constraints. In face-to-face settings, anger unfolds within relationships that involve long-term consequences, mutual recognition and the possibility of repair. Digital platforms remove these conditions. Anger becomes detached from direct negotiation and transformed into a broadcast signal aimed at audiences rather than interlocutors. Recent research has extended recalibration theory beyond interpersonal interaction to social institutions. Studies of Western criminal justice systems suggest that institutional practices often mirror evolved anger mechanisms, particularly the human tendency toward punitive responses driven by moral outrage. These systems may fail

[22] Bennett, K. (2024) 'Did Anger Evolve to Make Us Happy?', Psychology Today, 20 March; Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/modern-minds/202403/did-anger-evolve-to-make-us-happy.

when they escalate anger rather than resolve it, revealing a deeper mismatch between human emotional architecture and bureaucratic procedures. The broader implication is that institutions succeed or fail depending on how well they align with human emotional design. Within networked communication systems, anger becomes especially powerful because it is legible, contagious and profitable. Expressions of anger signal moral seriousness, boundary enforcement and group loyalty. They are rewarded with visibility, engagement and social reinforcement. In this environment, anger no longer merely recalibrates relationships. It becomes an identity marker and a form of symbolic capital. The question shifts from whether anger promotes fairness to whether it is being continuously exploited as an attention mechanism. This does not mean anger is inherently harmful. The recalibration theory insists that anger can support cooperation by discouraging exploitation. The danger arises when anger is constantly activated without resolution. Chronic anger loses its corrective function and becomes corrosive. Digital infrastructures specialise in sustaining this condition by presenting endless provocations without pathways for repair or renegotiation. The alarm sounds repeatedly, but nothing is recalibrated. Traditional approaches to anger management focus on individual regulation through cognitive reappraisal, communication skills or mindfulness. While valuable, these strategies address symptoms rather than structure. The sociology of digital anger asks a different question. What happens when an evolved emotional mechanism designed for negotiation and fairness is embedded in systems that reward escalation, permanence and spectacle? From this perspective, anger did not evolve to make humans happy. It evolved to make social life workable under conditions of vulnerability and interdependence. Happiness was never the goal. Stability, fairness and survival were. In digital societies, anger persists not because it still fulfils this role, but because it has been repurposed into an infrastructure of visibility, identity and power. Understanding anger as an alarm system helps explain both its original value and its contemporary dysfunction.

The logic of human anger

Anger is not a psychological malfunction or a cultural accident. In evolutionary terms, it is a specialised regulatory system shaped to manage conflicts of interest in social life. Sell, Tooby and Cosmides propose[23] that anger evolved as a bargaining mechanism, designed to recalibrate how much weight others place on one's welfare. Rather than merely reacting to harm, anger functions as a strategic signal: it activates when a person detects that another individual is undervaluing their interests and seeks to correct this imbalance. At the core of this model lies the concept of welfare tradeoff ratios. In any social interaction, individuals implicitly balance their own welfare against that of others. These tradeoffs are not abstract moral principles but internal regulatory variables that guide behaviour. When another person acts in a way that places too little weight on one's welfare, anger is triggered. The emotion then organises behaviour aimed at forcing a recalibration of that ratio in the angry individual's favour. Anger, in this sense, is not about venting emotion but about renegotiating social terms. The recalibrational logic of anger relies on two fundamental bargaining tools available to social organisms. The first is the ability to inflict costs, such as through physical aggression, intimidation or punishment. The second is the ability to confer or withhold benefits, such as cooperation, alliance, affection or access to valued resources. Anger prepares the individual to

[23] Sell, A., Tooby, J. and Cosmides, L. (2009) 'Formidability and the logic of human anger', Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 106(35), pp. 15073–15078.

signal that one or both of these tools will be deployed if the imbalance continues. Importantly, anger is often expressed before actual costs are imposed, allowing the target to adjust behaviour without escalation. This bargaining system depends on accurate internal assessments of leverage. Sell and colleagues argue that the anger system tracks two key dimensions: formidability, or the ability to impose costs, and benefit conferral, or the ability to provide valued advantages. Individuals who are more formidable or more valuable to others should expect better treatment and are therefore more likely to become angry when they are disrespected. Anger is thus calibrated to social position rather than evenly distributed across individuals. Empirical evidence supports this claim. Physical strength, particularly upper-body strength in men, predicts anger proneness, perceived entitlement and success in conflicts of interest. Stronger men report more frequent anger, a greater belief in the effectiveness of force, and a greater history of physical confrontation. These patterns are not random expressions of temperament but follow a functional logic: when anger is more likely to succeed, it is more likely to be activated. Attractiveness plays a parallel role, especially for women. Because attractiveness is associated with health, fertility and social value, more attractive individuals possess greater leverage in social exchanges. They receive preferential treatment across many domains, from employment to legal judgement, and implicitly expect higher welfare tradeoffs from others. When these expectations are violated, anger is more likely to arise. This explains why entitlement and anger are not moral flaws but outputs of an evolved calibration system. Sex differences emerge naturally from this framework. Ancestrally, physical aggression was a more effective bargaining tool for men than for women, while benefit conferral through mate choice carried greater leverage for women. Accordingly, strength has a stronger effect on anger in men, while attractiveness has a stronger effect in women. These differences are not cultural stereotypes but statistical consequences of evolved bargaining asymmetries. Crucially, the internal logic of anger reflects ancestral social environments rather than modern institutional realities. One striking finding is that stronger men are more likely to endorse the use of military force in international conflicts, even though individual strength has no rational relevance to modern state warfare. This suggests that anger-related decision systems evolved in small-scale societies where personal formidability mattered directly and continue to influence judgement in large-scale, abstract political contexts. For a sociology of anger, this insight is decisive. Anger is not simply an internal feeling, but a social technology shaped by evolutionary pressures and redeployed in modern institutions. In digital environments, where signals of outrage, threat and punishment circulate without physical constraint, the same recalibrational logic operates at scale. Online anger seeks to impose costs through shaming and exclusion, or to withdraw benefits through boycotts and deplatforming. What once regulated face-to-face bargaining now animates networked moral conflict. Anger, then, is best understood not as irrationality but as a functional program whose outputs can become dangerously misaligned with contemporary social systems. Its logic remains powerful precisely because it is ancient, automatic and deeply social.

Anger for change

Anger has long been treated as a disruptive force in public life, yet modern research increasingly recognises it as one of the most powerful engines of political mobilisation. Kat Williams and

Scott R. Stroud's article[24] 'Angry for Change' (2020) examines how anger operates as a powerful but ethically ambivalent force in democratic life, capable of mobilising political participation while simultaneously posing risks to deliberation, justice and social cohesion. Within the framework of this book, anger matters not because it is virtuous in itself, but because it operates as a social energy capable of reorganising attention, commitment and collective action. In democratic societies, anger has repeatedly functioned as a catalyst for participation, especially among those who feel excluded, ignored or structurally disadvantaged. Empirical political research in the United States demonstrates that anger is a particularly effective motivator of civic engagement. Studies led by Nicholas Valentino show that angry citizens are more likely than those driven by enthusiasm or anxiety to engage in visible political behaviour such as attending rallies, volunteering, displaying campaign symbols or turning out to vote. Anger, in this sense, does not paralyse; it activates. It directs people outward, toward confrontation with institutions and elites, rather than inward toward resignation. From a sociological perspective, this helps explain why anger has become a preferred emotional register in mass politics, especially under conditions of perceived injustice or democratic stagnation. The moral defence of anger has been developed most clearly in feminist philosophy. Myisha Cherry and Macalester Bell argue that anger can perform several ethically valuable functions: it names wrongdoing, assigns moral significance to harm, motivates resistance, and generates knowledge. Anger, on this account, is epistemic. It reveals social realities that are otherwise normalised or obscured. Groups subjected to systemic injustice often come to understand their position precisely through the hostile reactions provoked by their anger. When peaceful protest is met with repression, the anger that follows does not merely express pain; it confirms the structure of domination. Audre Lorde's essay 'The Uses of Anger' provides a powerful illustration of this logic. For Lorde, anger was not a loss of control but a resource that transformed private suffering into collective articulation. Anger forced attention, demanded response, and converted marginalised experience into political speech. Within this framework, anger functions as a technology of audibility: it makes claims that cannot be politely ignored. In networked publics, this function is intensified, as anger travels faster, reaches wider audiences, and confers visibility on issues otherwise excluded from mainstream discourse. Political theorists such as Amia Srinivasan extend this argument by suggesting that public anger can reshape moral understanding itself. Anger does not merely demand redress; it educates. By insisting that certain harms matter, it presses societies to revise their moral boundaries. Historical movements for civil rights and labour protection relied on what might be called righteous anger: a collective emotion that transformed fear into resolve and isolation into solidarity. Anger, in these cases, did not fragment the public sphere but reorganised it around new standards of justice. Yet the same features that make anger politically potent also make it dangerous. Philosophers often labelled as anger-pessimists, from Seneca to Martha Nussbaum, warn that anger easily slides from protest into retribution. Once anger seeks punishment rather than change, it risks undermining justice itself. Nussbaum argues that while anger can draw attention to injustice, its fixation on payback often blocks reconciliation and durable reform. From this perspective, anger must be tightly constrained if it is not to corrode democratic norms. These concerns acquire new urgency in contemporary media environments. Research by Berry and Sobieraj documents the rise of an outrage-based media economy in which emotional provocation becomes a business model. Cable news and digital platforms increasingly rely on

[24] Williams, K. and Stroud, S.R. (2020) 'Angry for change', Center for Media Engagement, University of Texas at Austin. Available at: https://mediaengagement.org/research/angry-for-change/ (Accessed: 16 January 2026).

sensationalism, moral polarisation and personalised blame to sustain attention. In this environment, anger is no longer episodic or situational; it becomes ambient. Outrage is constantly renewed, rarely resolved, and systematically rewarded. The result is a public sphere dominated by escalation rather than deliberation. From the perspective of this book, the ethical question is not whether anger should exist in politics, but how it is structured, channelled and governed. Anger can illuminate injustice and mobilise reform, but it can also be weaponised, commodified and turned into an infrastructure of permanent conflict. When institutions respond primarily to the loudest and most outraged voices, moderation is marginalised and compromise becomes politically toxic. Classical philosophy already anticipated this tension. Aristotle argued that anger is justified only when directed at the right object, in the right way, at the right time. This demanding criterion highlights the difficulty of ethical anger in mass societies, and even more so in digital networks where scale, speed and anonymity disrupt proportionality. Anger for change remains indispensable, but without limits it risks becoming anger as spectacle, identity and habit. In contemporary democracies, anger is neither a moral cure nor a moral disease. It is a force. Whether it produces justice or destruction depends on the social systems that amplify it, the narratives that legitimise it, and the institutions that absorb or exploit it.

The benefits of anger

Anger is often described as a disruptive or dangerous emotion, yet a closer examination reveals that it plays a vital role in human survival, motivation and social coordination[25]. Rather than being inherently destructive, anger contains a form of energy[26] that can be directed toward protection, correction and change. Within the framework of this book, anger is best understood not as a personal failure of self-control but as a social signal that activates when individuals or groups perceive obstruction, injustice or threat. At its most basic level, anger functions as an alarm system. It is closely connected to the body's fight response, mobilising physiological resources when something important is at stake. Increased heart rate, muscle tension and sharpened attention prepare the individual to confront danger rather than withdraw from it. In ancestral environments, this mechanism supported physical survival. In contemporary societies, the same system is activated by symbolic threats such as humiliation, exclusion, unfair treatment or loss of status. Anger signals that boundaries have been crossed and that passivity would be costly. One of anger's defining features is that it is an approach-oriented emotion. Unlike fear or sadness, which tend to produce avoidance, anger pushes individuals toward action. It narrows focus, increases persistence and reduces hesitation. This is why anger is so effective at overcoming inertia. When goals are blocked or values violated, anger supplies the momentum required to confront obstacles and demand change. In social and political life, this makes anger a powerful driver of participation, protest and resistance. Anger also produces a subjective sense of control and optimism. When people are angry, they are more likely to believe that outcomes can be influenced and that risks are manageable. This psychological shift matters because collective action depends on confidence as much as grievance. Groups that feel only fear or despair are unlikely to mobilise. Groups that feel anger, by contrast, often develop a shared belief that action is both necessary and possible. In moments of crisis, anger can therefore reduce paralysis and facilitate coordination. Beyond motivation, anger plays an important communicative role. Constructively expressed anger clarifies expectations and

[25] Barbalet, J.M. (2001) Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[26] Averill, J.R. (1982) Anger and Aggression: An Essay on Emotion. New York: Springer.

enforces boundaries. In interpersonal relationships, unspoken resentment tends to erode trust, while appropriately articulated anger can restore balance by signalling what is unacceptable. The same logic operates at the societal level. Anger communicates that certain behaviours or arrangements violate shared norms. In this way, anger contributes to social regulation rather than undermining it. Anger can also be a source of learning. Episodes of anger often reveal misalignments between lived experience and moral expectation. When individuals reflect on their anger, they gain insight into what they value and where they feel vulnerable. At the collective level, anger exposes injustices that have been normalised or ignored. Many social reforms begin not with calm deliberation but with sustained moral anger that forces issues into public visibility. Anger, in this sense, has epistemic value: it brings hidden conflicts to light. Embracing anger rather than repressing it can contribute to emotional intelligence. Emotional maturity does not require the absence of anger but the capacity to recognise, regulate and channel it. People who acknowledge difficult emotions are often more resilient than those who seek emotional comfort alone. Anger, handled with care, becomes a resource for self-knowledge and growth rather than a threat to well-being. However, the benefits of anger are conditional. Anger becomes harmful when it is chronic, misdirected or detached from resolution. Repressed anger can manifest as depression, anxiety or physical illness, while unchecked anger can escalate into aggression and violence. In modern media environments, anger is increasingly prolonged and amplified. Digital systems reward outrage without closure, transforming anger from a situational response into a permanent state. When anger no longer leads to correction or change, it loses its adaptive function and becomes socially corrosive. For the purposes of this book, the central point is not to celebrate anger uncritically, nor to condemn it outright. Anger is a form of energy that can illuminate injustice, motivate action and restore balance, but it can also be exploited, monetised and weaponised. Whether anger produces cooperation or conflict depends on how it is structured, expressed and governed within social systems. Understanding its benefits is therefore essential, not to justify perpetual outrage, but to distinguish between anger that leads to change and anger that merely sustains division.

Anger as a plus

In her 2003 article[27] ‘Anger as a Plus’, written for the American Psychological Association, Tori DeAngelis synthesises psychological research showing that anger, far from being merely destructive, can function as a socially productive emotion in relationships, workplaces and political life. For a sociology of anger, this argument is crucial because it reframes anger not as a failure of rationality but as a structured response that can clarify conflicts, redistribute power and mobilise collective action. Anger has long been treated with suspicion in moral, religious and philosophical traditions, often associated with loss of control or violence. Yet empirical research challenges the assumption that anger is inherently harmful. Psychologists increasingly distinguish anger from aggression, noting that the two coincide far less often than popular belief suggests. Most episodes of anger do not result in violence, and much violence occurs without anger at all. This distinction allows anger to be analysed as a communicative and motivational force rather than a pathological impulse. In everyday social life, anger often plays a corrective role. Studies of ordinary anger episodes show that, in many cases, anger leads to positive or neutral long-term outcomes rather than damage. When expressed in a context where it is heard

[27] DeAngelis, T. (2003) ‘Anger as a plus’, Monitor on Psychology, 34(3), p. 44. American Psychological Association.

and responded to, anger can bring underlying problems to the surface, forcing issues that were previously ignored or minimised into explicit discussion. In intimate relationships, anger can function as an alert system, signalling that one party feels unheard, disrespected or disadvantaged. When the response is appropriate, misunderstandings are corrected and relationships strengthened rather than weakened. From this perspective, constructive anger is less about emotional release than about problem-solving. Psychologists emphasise that anger becomes productive when it is framed around resolving a shared issue rather than asserting dominance or seeking revenge. Anger that is embedded in dialogue and oriented toward solutions can recalibrate expectations and restore balance. By contrast, anger that is either suppressed or explosively discharged tends to produce negative outcomes. Suppressed anger is associated with depression, stress and physical illness, while unchecked anger can escalate into aggression and coercion. Anger also plays a significant role in hierarchies of power and status. In organisational and political contexts, anger is often interpreted not as weakness but as strength. Research shows that individuals who express anger in professional or political settings are frequently perceived as more competent, confident and authoritative than those who express sadness or guilt. Anger, in these arenas, operates as a strategic signal rather than an emotional confession. It communicates resolve, certainty and a willingness to confront opposition, all of which can enhance perceived leadership. This status effect helps explain why anger has been repeatedly mobilised in political movements. Historically, large-scale social change has rarely occurred through polite appeals alone. Movements such as women's suffrage and civil rights relied on sustained collective anger to disrupt complacency and force recognition of injustice. Anger transformed moral claims into political pressure. Without it, grievances remained invisible or easily dismissed. Anger, in this sense, functions as a mechanism that converts moral discontent into public force. The empowering effects of anger become especially visible during periods of crisis and uncertainty. Research conducted after major traumatic events shows that anger can reduce fear and increase a sense of control. Compared to fear, which amplifies uncertainty and risk aversion, anger simplifies the emotional landscape, producing confidence and readiness for action. This can have adaptive consequences at the collective level, enabling coordination and resilience in the face of threat. However, this same simplification can also narrow judgment, making individuals more prone to bias and overconfidence. For a sociology of digital anger, these findings acquire new significance. The same properties that make anger effective in face-to-face contexts—its clarity, confidence and mobilising force—are amplified in media systems that reward emotional intensity. Anger travels well across networks, attracts attention and sustains engagement. Yet when anger is detached from resolution and continuously reactivated, its constructive potential erodes. What begins as an alert can become a permanent condition, reinforcing polarisation rather than correcting injustice. Anger, then, is neither a moral virtue nor a social toxin by default. It is a tool. Its effects depend on context, expression and institutional mediation. Anger can clarify problems, empower the marginalised and motivate change, but it can also distort judgment and entrench conflict when exploited or prolonged. Recognising anger as a plus does not mean celebrating outrage uncritically. It means understanding anger's social logic, its benefits and its limits, especially in environments where it has become a dominant currency of public life.

The moral justification of anger

Jinjin Zhang, Zhiheng Xiong, Hao Zheng and Xiangzhen Ma's article[28] 'The Moral Psychological Justification of Anger: An Exploration of Self-Respect and Recognition' reframes anger not as a problem to be judged by its outcomes, but as a moral signal whose meaning depends on what, exactly, is being demanded when someone gets angry. In moral psychology and in everyday talk, anger is often treated in a simple consequentialist way: if it produces harm, it is condemned; if it produces reform, it is praised. That framing fits public debate, but it does not explain why anger feels compelling even when it is counterproductive, or why people remain angry when 'payback' is clearly unavailable. This paper proposes a shift from consequences to foundations: anger is best understood as bound to recognition, to the need to be acknowledged as a person whose dignity counts. This move matters directly for a sociology of anger in networked public life. Online, anger rarely arrives as a private feeling seeking quiet resolution. It circulates as a claim, a badge, and a demand, often addressed to an audience as much as to an offender. Anger becomes communicative infrastructure: it marks boundaries, declares injuries, and recruits allies. The paper's central distinction therefore becomes useful: anger can be justified when it responds to a failure of equal recognition, and unjustified when it expresses a craving for superiority, status, or dominance. In other words, not all anger is the same kind of moral speech. Some anger asks to be treated as an equal; some anger asks to be treated as above others. The paper also challenges the common philosophical picture that anger is essentially retaliatory. A great deal of anti-anger argumentation, from classical scepticism to modern liberal moral theory, treats anger as a wish for revenge that cannot truly repair what has been lost, cannot restore dignity, and therefore distracts from justice. Against this, the authors argue that anger's deeper aim is often neither cruelty nor compensation, but recognition: a demand that wrongdoing be named as wrongdoing, that belittlement be admitted as belittlement, and that the offended party be taken seriously. That claim helps explain a familiar pattern: anger may soften when a sincere acknowledgement appears, even when no punishment follows, while it may intensify when an injury is denied, minimised, or mocked. A key hinge in the argument is the difference between self-respect and self-esteem. Self-respect concerns standing as an equal person whose basic dignity should not be violated; self-esteem is more vulnerable to social comparison, appraisal, and prestige. This matters because anger that protects self-respect can be morally intelligible even when it is disruptive, while anger that protects a fragile superiority can become arrogant and socially corrosive. The paper's language of recognition helps clarify why some anger focuses on humiliation, degradation, and disrespect rather than on physical harm alone. A natural disaster can produce fear and grief, but it rarely produces anger in the same way, because anger is oriented toward intentionality, agency, and the sense of being treated as 'less than'. Anger is thus connected to moral injury: an experienced violation of status as a person who deserves equal regard. This approach also illuminates why anger is so easily politicised and scaled. Collective anger often presents itself as an answer to injustice, but it may also hide mixed motives: demands for equal respect can coexist with demands for special honour; resistance can coexist with the performance of superiority. In digital environments, such mixtures are intensified because platforms reward moral certainty, sharp antagonism, and public displays of injury. Anger can become identity, and identity can become a permanent readiness to take offence. The authors therefore recommend a practical ethical reorientation: instead of only

[28] Zhang, J., Xiong, Z., Zheng, H. and Ma, X. (2024) 'The Moral Psychological Justification of Anger: An Exploration of Self-Respect and Recognition', Behavioral Sciences (Basel), 15(1), 3. doi:10.3390/bs15010003.

asking whether anger 'works', attention should turn to what anger reveals about unmet recognition, damaged self-respect, and the social conditions that make acknowledgement hard. The aim is not to romanticise anger as justice, nor to pathologise it as irrationality, but to treat it as a diagnostic force that can be guided toward mutual recognition rather than escalated into hostility.

2.3. Moral anger

Moral anger as motivation

Myisha Cherry's article[29] 'Moral Anger, Motivation, and Productivity' examines moral anger as a distinct social emotion whose primary function is not catharsis or retaliation but motivation directed toward the correction of perceived injustice (Cherry, 2018). Moral anger differs from ordinary anger in both object and structure. Whereas everyday anger may arise from frustration, insult, or personal failure, moral anger is triggered by violations of ethical norms such as injustice, domination, exclusion, or abuse of power. It appears in forms such as indignation, resentment, and protest, and is inseparable from moral judgement. In the context of the sociology of anger, moral anger functions as a mechanism that converts ethical perception into collective action. Cherry situates moral anger within a long-standing philosophical dispute over whether anger can ever be morally justified. Classical and religious traditions, represented by figures such as Seneca and John Cassian, treated anger as corrosive to judgement and incompatible with justice. Anger was seen as a force that overwhelms reason and pulls agents toward excess. In contrast, other philosophical traditions defended a qualified form of anger as a moral necessity. Thinkers such as Aristotle, Joseph Butler, and Immanuel Kant recognised indignation as an appropriate response to wrongdoing, particularly where injustice would otherwise be tolerated. Cherry aligns herself with this latter tradition, arguing that eliminating moral anger risks weakening moral perception itself. Central to Cherry's argument is the claim that moral anger is motivational rather than merely expressive. Psychological research on emotion supports the idea that anger is associated with approach-oriented motivation rather than withdrawal. Unlike fear or sadness, which incline individuals toward avoidance, anger generates a sense of agency, control, and readiness for action. This matters sociologically because moral anger does not remain private. It encourages mobilisation, protest, and sustained engagement with unjust structures. Anger is uncomfortable, and this discomfort produces pressure for resolution. Justice becomes the appropriate object of the emotion, not because justice erases anger entirely, but because it relieves the moral tension that anger expresses. Cherry rejects the view that acting from moral anger is egoistic or self-indulgent. Drawing on Joseph Butler's critique of psychological egoism, she argues that emotions are directed toward objects in the world, not toward the agent's own pleasure. Moral anger is oriented toward justice itself. While relief or satisfaction may follow successful action, these are by-products rather than motives. This distinction is crucial in digital societies where anger is often dismissed as performative or narcissistic. Cherry's account insists that moral anger cannot be satisfied by distraction, venting, or symbolic gestures. Only the correction of the injustice that provoked it can fulfil the emotion. Attempts to replace moral anger with virtues such as meekness or calm acceptance are therefore sociologically risky. Cherry engages critically with Glen Pettigrove's proposal that meekness should substitute for anger, arguing that such substitution alters the

[29] Cherry, M. (2018) 'Moral Anger, Motivation, and Productivity', Journal of Social Philosophy, 49(2), pp. 208–229.

moral evaluation embedded in the emotion. Emotions are not detachable from judgement. Suppressing anger often involves revising the belief that an injustice has occurred, thereby normalising harm. Moral anger preserves the moral salience of wrongdoing over time, preventing injustice from becoming invisible through habituation. Moral anger is also productive in a collective sense. It sustains what have been described as 'rage projects': organised movements, campaigns, and practices aimed at structural change. The disposition to be morally angry can function as a deterrent, signalling that violations will not pass unnoticed. While critics argue that anger among the oppressed can turn inward and become destructive, Cherry responds that such outcomes are better explained by structural conditions such as poverty, marginalisation, and lack of political channels, rather than by moral anger itself. Anger misdirected is not evidence against anger as such, but against the conditions that distort it. Cherry further challenges sanitised narratives of political change that attribute success to meekness alone. Figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Mahatma Gandhi repeatedly articulated moral anger in their own writings and speeches. Their non-violence was not the absence of anger but its disciplined organisation. Moral anger supplied the energy, persistence, and clarity required for long-term struggle. What distinguished their anger was not calmness, but its refusal to collapse into vengeance. Within the broader framework of this book, moral anger appears as a central mechanism in networked societies. It links ethical perception to mobilisation, recognition to resistance, and individual emotion to collective action. The problem is not that moral anger exists, but that digital infrastructures increasingly capture, amplify, and monetise it. Understanding moral anger as motivation rather than pathology is therefore essential for analysing how contemporary publics are mobilised, polarised, and governed through outrage.

Moral panic

Drawing[30] on Stanley Cohen's 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics'(1972), this section analyses moral panic as a social process through which collective anger and fear are organised, amplified, and transformed into instruments of moral regulation and political control . In the sociology of anger, moral panic occupies a crucial position because it demonstrates how moral emotions are not merely spontaneous reactions but are actively structured by media systems, political actors, and institutional interests. Moral panic emerges when a condition, group, or behaviour is framed as a threat to shared values, provoking moral anger that exceeds the actual harm involved and becomes socially contagious. Moral panic is not simply mass fear or hysteria. It is a patterned reaction in which moral anger is directed toward symbolic enemies, often labelled as 'folk devils'. These figures may be real groups or abstract categories, but they function as moral condensers, absorbing diffuse anxieties and converting them into focused indignation. In this sense, moral panic is an economy of anger: it simplifies complex social problems by assigning blame to visible targets, allowing societies to discharge moral tension without addressing underlying structural causes. Anger here is not random but narratively organised, morally charged, and publicly legitimised. Cohen's original analysis of the British reaction to the 'mods and rockers' youth subcultures revealed a recurring sequence. An event is identified as threatening, media representations exaggerate its danger, moral entrepreneurs frame it as a crisis of values, authorities respond with symbolic or legal action, and the panic eventually dissipates or becomes normalised. What is sociologically significant is not whether

[30] Cohen, S. (1972) Folk Devils and Moral Panics. London: MacGibbon and Kee.

the initial event was real, but how it was transformed into a moral drama. Ordinary deviance becomes evidence of moral collapse, and anger becomes the appropriate emotional response. The untypical is made typical, and isolated incidents are reinterpreted as symptoms of systemic decay. Within this process, moral anger plays a central role. It provides the emotional energy that sustains consensus, legitimises intervention, and silences dissent. Moral panic depends on indignation that feels righteous and urgent. This anger is rarely experienced as manipulation by those who feel it; instead, it is lived as moral clarity. The strength of moral panic lies precisely in this subjective certainty. Once anger is moralised, questioning its proportionality can itself appear immoral. Doubt becomes complicity, and restraint is reframed as weakness. Later theorists such as Goode and Ben-Yehuda refined the concept by identifying core features of moral panic, including concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. These elements highlight how moral anger becomes socially amplified. Disproportionality is especially relevant for the sociology of digital anger. Moral panics are defined not by the absence of harm, but by the inflation of threat relative to evidence. Anger exceeds its object. This excess allows moral panic to justify punitive responses, new laws, or expanded surveillance, often with lasting consequences long after the panic itself has faded. Moral panic also reveals the political uses of anger. British cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall showed how moral panics around crime could be mobilised to support authoritarian policies and reinforce class power. By framing social insecurity as a moral threat rather than an economic or structural one, political actors redirect anger away from systemic causes and toward marginal groups. Anger becomes a tool of governance. In this sense, moral panic is not a failure of rationality but a functional mechanism within late capitalist societies, where emotional mobilisation substitutes for structural reform. In contemporary networked societies, moral panic has not disappeared but accelerated. Digital media intensifies the speed, scale, and persistence of moral outrage. Algorithmic amplification rewards emotionally charged content, while platforms collapse temporal distance between event and reaction. Moral panic becomes continuous rather than episodic. Anger no longer needs to be sustained by elite actors alone; it is reproduced horizontally through sharing, commenting, and performative denunciation. However, the underlying structure remains recognisable: symbolic threats, simplified narratives, moral entrepreneurs, and disproportionate responses. Moral panic must therefore be distinguished from moral anger as such. Moral anger can be a legitimate response to injustice, motivating resistance and reform. Moral panic, by contrast, is a distortion of moral anger. It detaches indignation from careful judgement and redirects it toward scapegoats. In moral panic, anger is not oriented toward recognition or justice, but toward purification and exclusion. The goal is not correction but containment, not reform but reassurance. Understanding moral panic is essential for analysing how contemporary societies govern through emotion. It shows how anger can be collectively organised into spectacles of threat that stabilise existing power relations. Within the broader argument of this book, moral panic illustrates the transformation of moral anger into an infrastructure: a repeatable pattern through which fear, outrage, and identity are synchronised at scale. Recognising this pattern is a first step toward distinguishing between anger that illuminates injustice and anger that obscures it.

Indignation

Charles Darwin's 'The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals' (1872), examines indignation[31] as a socially legible expression of moral offence, this chapter conceptualises indignation as a specific form of moral anger that emerges when perceived violations of social norms threaten dignity, recognition, and moral order. Indignation is not simply anger intensified, nor is it reducible to private frustration. It is a distinctly social emotion, structured by shared expectations, collective standards, and judgments of blame. Within the sociology of anger, indignation occupies a crucial position between personal affect and public morality, translating perceived injustice into moral evaluation and potential action. Indignation arises when actions are interpreted as unjust, offensive, or contemptuous in relation to an accepted normative framework. Unlike basic anger triggered by obstruction or frustration, indignation presupposes an evaluative stance: someone is judged to have acted wrongly, and that wrongdoing is understood as violating an objective or shared moral order. For this reason, indignation is inseparable from blame. The emotion does not merely register harm but assigns responsibility, directing negative affect toward an identifiable agent. This makes indignation particularly significant for collective life, as it transforms individual offence into moral meaning that can be communicated, shared, and mobilised. From a sociological perspective, indignation is adaptive rather than pathological. It functions as a signal that norms have been breached and that recognition has been denied. Social environments play a decisive role in shaping when and how indignation is felt. Norms operate both externally, as shared rules governing conduct, and internally, as expectations embedded within the self. When these norms are disrupted, indignation emerges as an affective response that simultaneously expresses offence and asserts moral standing. In this sense, indignation defends self-respect and collective values rather than mere emotional equilibrium. Attribution processes are central to the emergence of indignation. Drawing on attribution theory, sociological and psychological research demonstrates that individuals rapidly assess whether harmful behaviour is situational or dispositional. When actions are interpreted as intentional, stable, and character-driven, indignation becomes more likely and more intense. Fritz Heider's attributional framework helps explain why the same outcome may provoke sadness, disappointment, or anger in one context but indignation in another. Indignation depends not on harm alone, but on the perceived moral meaning of that harm. This distinction is sharpened by the contrast between entity and incremental theories of moral character. Entity-oriented interpretations treat behaviour as an expression of fixed moral traits, encouraging stable judgments and moral condemnation. Within this framework, indignation becomes durable and resistant to revision, as wrongdoing is seen as revealing who a person truly is. Incremental interpretations, by contrast, situate behaviour within changing circumstances and developmental trajectories, moderating indignation by allowing for reform, explanation, and context. The sociology of anger is therefore inseparable from underlying moral psychologies that shape how societies allocate blame and forgiveness. Defensive attribution processes further intensify indignation by linking moral judgment to self-protection. Individuals are more likely to attribute blame dispositionally when distancing themselves from perceived wrongdoers, reinforcing boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. This mechanism aligns indignation with social identity, status preservation, and moral hierarchy. The actor–observer effect reinforces this asymmetry, excusing one's own failures as situational while interpreting others' failures as moral flaws. In collective contexts, such dynamics contribute to polarisation, moral outrage, and the escalation of conflict. Indignation plays a particularly visible role in

[31] Darwin, C. (1872) The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals. London: John Murray.

politics. Political decisions affect large populations and are easily framed as violations of shared values, making indignation a recurring feature of public life. Political actors both generate and respond to indignation, strategically mobilising it to challenge opponents, consolidate identities, and legitimise conflict. Debates, scandals, and media performances often aim not at persuasion but at provoking indignation, destabilising rivals by attacking their moral legitimacy. In this sense, indignation becomes a governing emotion within contemporary media politics. Importantly, indignation is not inherently violent. When not immediately discharged through aggression, it often becomes reflective, investigative, and communicative. Indignation motivates individuals to ask why an offence occurred, what norms were violated, and what response would restore moral balance. This reflective dimension distinguishes moral indignation from impulsive rage and aligns it with deliberation, protest, and institutional critique. Religious traditions have long theorised indignation as morally ambivalent. Christian doctrines of righteous indignation frame it as permissible when directed at injustice rather than revenge. Such accounts underscore a broader sociological insight: indignation is judged not by its intensity but by its object, orientation, and limits. When indignation seeks recognition, accountability, and moral repair, it functions as a stabilising force within social life. When detached from proportionality and recognition, it risks hardening into resentment or moral absolutism. Within the broader framework of this book, indignation appears as a pivotal mechanism through which anger becomes moralised, socialised, and politicised. It bridges private emotion and public judgment, linking subjective offence to shared narratives of justice. Understanding indignation is therefore essential for analysing how anger circulates, escalates, and is governed in modern societies shaped by media amplification, moral competition, and struggles for recognition.

Moral anger dilemma

In ‘Moral anger as a dilemma? An investigation on how leader moral anger influences follower trust’, Bo Shao[32] examines a structural tension at the heart of moral authority in hierarchical and organisational contexts, a tension that is central to the sociology of anger developed in this book: moral anger can function as a signal of ethical seriousness, yet it can simultaneously erode the relational trust on which authority depends. Rather than treating anger as a purely individual emotion or a managerial tactic, the article conceptualises moral anger as a communicative act embedded in power relations, interpretive frameworks, and expectations of care. The analysis begins from the observation that anger is one of the most frequently displayed emotions by leaders, yet research has largely focused on anger linked to performance failures or frustration. By shifting attention to ethical situations, the article reframes anger as a response to moral transgressions, violations of shared norms, or harm done to others. Moral anger is defined as an aroused emotional state triggered by the appraisal of a moral standard violation that motivates corrective action, even when such action carries personal or relational risk. This outward-facing orientation distinguishes moral anger from ordinary irritation or self-protective rage and places it squarely within the domain of moral regulation. Leadership, however, operates through trust. Trust is understood not simply as confidence in competence, but as a willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about another’s intentions. From a sociological perspective, trust is sustained through emotional signals that convey

[32] Shao, B. (2021) ‘Moral anger as a dilemma? An investigation on how leader moral anger influences follower trust’, Journal of Business Ethics, 170(3), pp. 487–502.

benevolence, fairness, and predictability. Moral anger therefore introduces an interpretive ambiguity: while it may communicate commitment to norms, it can also communicate threat, punishment, or emotional volatility. The central problem is not whether moral anger is justified, but how it is received and decoded by those subject to it. The article develops a dual-pathway model to explain how moral anger may influence follower trust. The first pathway is character-based. Moral anger may increase trust by signalling integrity, suggesting that the leader possesses strong moral commitments and the courage to enforce them. The second pathway is relationship-based. Moral anger may reduce trust by signalling diminished benevolence, making the leader appear harsh, unsafe, or indifferent to the emotional costs imposed on others. These competing interpretations highlight a core sociological insight: emotions do not carry fixed meanings, but are interpreted within relational and normative contexts. A further layer of complexity is introduced through differences in followers' moral orientations. Drawing on ethical theory, the article distinguishes between justice-oriented and care-oriented moral reasoning. Justice-oriented individuals prioritise rules, fairness, and accountability, and may therefore interpret moral anger as appropriate norm enforcement. Care-oriented individuals prioritise empathy, relational harmony, and the minimisation of harm, and may interpret the same anger as a failure of consideration or compassion. The meaning of moral anger, then, depends not only on the leader's intent, but on the moral frameworks through which followers interpret emotional displays. Empirical findings from experimental studies complicate optimistic accounts of moral anger. The evidence does not support the idea that moral anger reliably increases trust by enhancing perceptions of integrity. Followers do not consistently interpret angry moral reactions as evidence of stronger character. Instead, the relationship-based pathway proves more consequential. Moral anger tends to reduce affective trust, the dimension of trust grounded in emotional security, goodwill, and relational safety. Importantly, this reduction does not necessarily undermine overall or cognitive trust. Leaders may still be seen as competent or legitimate, while becoming less emotionally approachable and less trusted on a personal level. This distinction is crucial for understanding moral anger as a social force. Moral anger may succeed in enforcing norms or signalling authority, but at the cost of relational erosion. The dilemma, therefore, is structural rather than incidental. Moral anger can be normatively intelligible and instrumentally rational, yet socially corrosive. It operates as a double-edged signal that simultaneously affirms standards and weakens the emotional foundations of cooperation. The article situates this dilemma within broader research on emotional signalling, emphasising that leader emotions communicate information about both moral judgement and relational stance. Moral anger does not automatically translate into moral authority. It can also be read as personal threat, withdrawal of goodwill, or a shift from influence to coercion. In contemporary environments shaped by digital communication and heightened moral visibility, these dynamics become even more pronounced, as anger circulates without contextual cues that might soften its relational impact. The conclusion advances a cautious approach to moral anger in leadership. Even when anger is morally justified, its expression must be carefully framed to distinguish condemnation of behaviour from devaluation of persons. Without such framing, moral anger risks transforming ethical leadership into fear-based compliance. Moral anger, in this sense, has a narrow operating window. It may defend standards, but it also threatens the affective trust that allows those standards to function through consent rather than intimidation.

Anger as a force for good

In 'The place and role of (moral) anger in organizational behavior studies', Dirk Lindebaum and Deanna Geddes develop[33] an account of moral anger that is directly relevant to the sociology of anger advanced in this book, arguing that anger can function as a socially productive force when it is oriented toward justice, the protection of others, and the correction of moral violations rather than toward self-interest or aggression. Against dominant managerial and psychological traditions that treat anger as inherently disruptive, the article reframes anger as a moral signal embedded in organisational structures, power relations, and normative expectations. The authors begin by identifying a persistent problem in organisational research and practice: anger is routinely collapsed into a single negative category associated with hostility, loss of control, bullying, or interpersonal failure. This conceptual flattening has encouraged zero-tolerance policies that seek to suppress anger altogether, often in the name of civility or emotional regulation. Lindebaum and Geddes argue that such approaches are not only theoretically crude but ethically and organisationally dangerous. When anger is treated as deviance by default, morally motivated protest can be silenced, allowing unethical practices to persist without challenge. Central to their argument is a careful distinction between moral anger and other forms of anger. Moral anger is defined as an aroused emotional state that emerges from a primary appraisal of a moral standard violation, one that affects others more than oneself and motivates corrective action even in the face of personal risk. This definition matters because it anchors moral anger in social concern rather than ego defence. Moral anger is not about venting frustration or asserting dominance; it is about responding to perceived injustice and attempting to restore acceptable moral conditions. The authors emphasise four features that distinguish moral anger from neighbouring emotional states. First, moral anger is situational rather than dispositional. It is not a personality trait but a context-specific response to a moral breach. This is important because trait anger has been strongly associated with aggression and antisocial outcomes, shaping the widespread assumption that anger has no legitimate place in organisational life. Second, moral anger arises from a primary moral appraisal, often rapid and intuitive, rather than from slow deliberation or calculated self-interest. Third, it is other-oriented, focused on harm to colleagues, communities, or broader social goods. Fourth, it is action-oriented but corrective rather than punitive, seeking to improve conditions rather than to injure or humiliate. By clarifying these features, Lindebaum and Geddes are able to differentiate moral anger from related concepts such as indignation, moral outrage, righteous anger, and empathic anger. While these emotions may overlap in everyday language, the authors argue that conflating them undermines analytical precision. Indignation may carry a stronger element of contempt; righteous anger may slide into retaliation; moral outrage is often framed in hostile or polarising terms; empathic anger may arise from care without reference to shared moral standards. Moral anger, by contrast, is anchored in norm violation and corrective intent. This conceptual discipline is essential if moral anger is to be studied empirically rather than celebrated rhetorically or dismissed administratively. The organisational implications of this argument are significant. The authors introduce the concept of emotionologies: socially shared beliefs about which emotions are appropriate and how they should be expressed. In many contemporary workplaces, anger emotionologies define anger as unprofessional or dangerous, regardless of context. Under such conditions, whistle-blowing, ethical dissent, and principled resistance may be misclassified as misconduct. Lindebaum and Geddes argue that suppressing

[33] Lindebaum, D. and Geddes, D. (2016) 'The place and role of (moral) anger in organizational behavior studies', Journal of Organizational Behavior, 37(5), pp. 738–757.

moral anger in this way removes an important diagnostic signal, one that can alert organisations to injustice, exploitation, or systemic failure before those problems escalate. Whistle-blowing is presented as a paradigmatic case in which moral anger can play a constructive role. Individuals who expose wrongdoing often act at considerable personal risk, motivated not by personal gain but by concern for others and for institutional integrity. The authors stress, however, that moral anger does not mechanically produce whistle-blowing. It is a state of readiness rather than a behavioural script. How moral anger is expressed depends on organisational culture, perceived safety, power asymmetries, and available channels for voice. This distinction allows moral anger to be studied as an emotional driver without reducing it to a single heroic narrative. Within the broader framework of this book, moral anger appears not as a threat to social order but as a mechanism through which moral boundaries are defended. In digitally mediated environments, where moral violations circulate rapidly and emotional responses are amplified, the stakes of misclassifying anger become even higher. If moral anger is dismissed as mere negativity, organisations and institutions may lose their capacity to correct themselves. The article concludes by calling for a more mature understanding of anger in organisational life. Anger is not synonymous with aggression, and suppressing all anger can be as harmful as indulging it indiscriminately. When moral anger is recognised, interpreted, and engaged with rather than silenced, it can support ethical reflection, institutional learning, and social repair. In this sense, anger is not simply a disruptive force to be managed, but a moral resource that, when properly understood, can contribute to justice and collective responsibility.

The ethics of moral anger

In 'The Moral Necessity of Anger', Krista K. Thomason argues[34] that anger is not a moral defect to be overcome but a necessary component of moral recognition itself, situating moral anger at the centre of how people perceive, respond to, and resist wrongdoing. Against influential traditions that treat anger as irrational, narcissistic, or normatively suspect, Thomason advances a constitutive account according to which anger is partly what it means to take moral wrongs seriously. To reject anger entirely, she suggests, is not merely to regulate an emotion but to alter the structure of moral agency. Thomason begins by confronting a long-standing scepticism toward anger, from Stoic condemnations of rage as a descent into madness to contemporary philosophical critiques that frame anger as a desire for payback or a fixation on wounded status. In contrast, she draws on Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian insights that regard appropriate anger as a sign of moral attunement rather than excess. The core of her position is that anger is not simply an optional emotional reaction layered on top of moral judgement. Instead, it is constitutive of recognising certain actions as wrongful in the first place. This constitutive claim is grounded in P. F. Strawson's account of reactive attitudes. Thomason situates anger within what Strawson describes as the participant stance, the practical orientation in which people regard one another as responsible agents owed goodwill, respect, and consideration. From within this stance, emotions such as resentment and anger arise naturally when expectations of mutual regard are violated. Anger, on this view, is not an accidental accompaniment to moral life but an expression of one's commitment to shared moral norms. A person who is never liable to anger would not simply be unusually calm; they would lack a key disposition required to register wrongs as morally salient. A central distinction in Thomason's

[34] Thomason, K.K. (2018) 'The Moral Necessity of Anger', in Lewis, C.D. and Bock, G.L. (eds.) The Ethics of Anger. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 63–82.

argument is between actually feeling anger and being liable to anger. Moral life does not require that anger always be felt whenever wrongdoing occurs. Emotions are contingent and subject to fatigue, temperament, and circumstance. What matters is the standing disposition to anger, the fact that one would reasonably be angered under appropriate conditions. This distinction allows Thomason to address the common objection that one can judge actions as wrong without feeling angry. Conceptually, that may be true in isolated cases, but a moral outlook in which anger never has any place would undermine the participant stance itself. This point becomes especially important when Thomason engages with moral exemplars often cited against anger, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and the Buddhist philosopher Śāntideva. These figures appear to reject anger while maintaining a deep commitment to justice. Thomason responds by showing that their moral frameworks do not simply subtract anger from ordinary moral psychology. Instead, they reconfigure agency and responsibility at a fundamental level. King's nonviolent ethic redirects moral protest away from individual wrongdoers toward impersonal forces of injustice, while Śāntideva's metaphysics dissolves the self in ways that weaken interpersonal blame altogether. These approaches do not preserve ordinary moral recognition without anger; they replace it with a transformed moral worldview. A second challenge concerns desirability. Even if anger is constitutively tied to moral recognition, critics argue that it should still be eliminated because of its destructive tendencies. Anger is said to distort judgement, escalate conflict, and damage relationships, whereas compassion and patience appear morally superior. Thomason accepts that anger can be excessive or misdirected, but she rejects the inference that anger as such is therefore defective. To criticise disproportionate anger is to criticise a failure of judgement, not the presence of anger itself. Moreover, many critiques presuppose controversial psychological assumptions, particularly the idea that anger essentially involves a wish for retaliation. Thomason denies that this is intrinsic to anger, proposing instead that anger is best understood as an emotional protest against disrespect or ill will. Seen this way, anger is not a thirst for revenge but a refusal to normalise wrongdoing. It affirms both the seriousness of the offence and the moral standing of persons as agents bound by norms of mutual accountability. To abandon anger is therefore not a small therapeutic improvement but a retreat from the moral significance of wrongs. Appeals to serenity or forgiveness often succeed only by redescribing agency in ways that soften or obscure responsibility, offering psychological relief at the cost of moral clarity. Thomason also challenges the idea that anger and compassion are opposites. Moral anger often arises from care, attachment, and concern for shared norms. People are angered precisely because they value relationships, dignity, and justice. Anger, on this account, is one way moral concern manifests itself, not its negation. The ethical conclusion is stark. A moral life entirely without anger would not be a refined version of ordinary morality but a different moral stance altogether, one that abandons the participant framework of mutual accountability. Moral anger, while always in need of regulation and reflection, is not a regrettable residue of justice but one of its conditions of possibility.

2.4. Righteous anger

The pleasure of righteous anger

The article[35] 'Righteous Anger and the Pleasure Centers of the Brain' examines the affective and neuropsychological dynamics of moral anger by linking ethical judgement to reward mechanisms in the brain, offering a speculative but revealing account of why righteous anger feels both empowering and difficult to relinquish. The text starts from a familiar insight in behavioural science: many forms of human behaviour become habitual or addictive because they stimulate the brain's reward system. Substances such as alcohol or drugs, risky activities, and competitive spectacles trigger the release of dopamine and related neurotransmitters, producing pleasure and reinforcing repetition even when the behaviour is harmful. The article proposes that anger, and especially righteous anger, operates according to a similar logic. Anger is widely recognised as an emotion that temporarily restores a sense of agency. It arises most often when a person initially feels frustrated, powerless, or unable to act. In these moments, anger reverses the emotional imbalance by producing a subjective experience of strength and control. Neuropsychological research suggests that this shift is not merely symbolic. Anger activates physiological arousal and reward-related neural pathways, including dopamine release, which generates a feeling of energy and potency. At the bodily level, anger does not only mobilise action; it also feels good. This hedonic quality explains why anger can be self-reinforcing even when it leads to destructive outcomes. The article extends this logic by arguing that ideas themselves can function as behaviours capable of activating pleasure circuits. Intellectual experiences such as reading powerful prose, engaging with poetry, or encountering religious language can produce a deep sense of satisfaction that resembles addiction. The pleasure lies not only in aesthetic form but in the reinforcement of meaning and coherence. When ideas resonate, they reward the mind. This insight becomes crucial for understanding righteous anger, which is anger triggered not primarily by personal harm but by perceived violations of moral order. In righteous anger, the offence is directed against one's values, principles, or vision of how the world ought to be. Righteous anger is therefore doubly rewarding. First, it restores a sense of agency in situations where the individual lacks real power to intervene. Second, it reinforces moral identity. When something is judged to be unjust, cruel, or evil, anger affirms the self as morally aligned with the good. The emotion feels not only pleasurable but correct. It confirms that one's values are intact and that one stands on the right side of the moral divide. The combination of emotional arousal, pleasure, and moral validation creates a powerful motivational loop. The anger feels meaningful, energising, and righteous, and this makes it attractive to revisit. This mechanism helps explain why righteous anger can become habitual, even compulsive. When individuals encounter repeated moral offences that they cannot personally correct, anger becomes a substitute form of action. It produces the sensation of doing something, even when no concrete intervention is possible. Over time, the repeated stimulation of reward pathways can make moral outrage a preferred emotional state. The article suggests that some people live in a near-permanent condition of righteous anger, sustained not only by external injustices but by the internal rewards the emotion provides. Importantly, the text does not frame this phenomenon as inherently immoral. Righteous anger can motivate resistance, solidarity, and ethical action. It can energise movements for justice and sustain commitment in the face of adversity. The problem arises when the pleasure of anger becomes detached from practical responsibility. When anger replaces action rather than motivating it, or when moral outrage becomes an end in itself, it risks transforming ethical

[35] Brain (2017). Daniel Taylor. [online] Daniel Taylor. Available at: https://www.wordtaylor.com/neither-nor-blog/righteous-anger-and-the-pleasure-centers-of-the-brain [Accessed 16 Jan. 2026].

concern into self-gratification. The anger feels morally justified, but its primary function shifts toward emotional reward rather than correction of wrongdoing. This dynamic has particular relevance for contemporary digital environments. Online platforms reward expressions of outrage through visibility, affirmation, and social reinforcement. Each performance of righteous anger is met with approval, agreement, or amplification, further strengthening the dopamine loop. In such conditions, moral anger can escalate, polarise, and harden into identity. What begins as a response to injustice risks becoming a pleasurable posture that resists resolution, because resolution would remove the emotional reward. The article raises an uncomfortable question about moral responsibility. If righteous anger is neurologically rewarding, does this undermine agency? The text resists this conclusion. Neurobiological predispositions do not eliminate moral choice. Humans are not obligated to indulge every emotion their brains reward. Just as people can resist other forms of addiction, they can choose how to respond to moral offence. The capacity for reflection allows individuals to distinguish between anger that motivates constructive action and anger that merely satisfies emotional appetite. Righteous anger, in this framework, becomes ethically ambiguous. It is neither purely virtuous nor simply pathological. Its moral value depends on whether it leads beyond itself toward repair, justice, or reconciliation. When anger becomes performative, exaggerated, or detached from realistic action, it risks doing more harm than good. The ethical task is therefore not to eliminate righteous anger but to discipline it, to refuse its seductive pleasures when they undermine judgement, and to channel moral energy into responses that genuinely improve the social world rather than merely affirming the self.

Righteous anger addiction

Sara Karnoscak develops the argument[36] in 'Our Righteous Anger Addiction' that contemporary digital culture has transformed moral anger into a psychologically rewarding habit, sustained by online environments that amplify outrage and convert ethical judgement into an addictive emotional loop. The text begins from a widely shared experience of the internet as a space saturated with conflict, where disagreement rarely remains civil and frequently escalates into insult, moral condemnation, and symbolic extremity. Phenomena such as Godwin's Law capture not merely rhetorical excess but a deeper structural tendency of online discourse to gravitate toward moral absolutism and emotional escalation. The persistence of this behaviour raises a central question. If online conflict is so visibly corrosive, why do people continue to participate in it so eagerly? Karnoscak's answer reframes the issue in affective rather than rational terms. Emotions, she argues, can be addictive. Anger activates physiological arousal through adrenaline and stimulates dopamine release, producing a short-lived sense of pleasure, empowerment, and control. In this respect, anger functions like other addictive stimuli, rewarding repetition even when the long-term consequences are harmful. In digital environments, inflammatory headlines and provocative comments operate as constant triggers for this emotional reward system. Righteous anger, however, represents a particularly potent form of this addiction. It combines the bodily pleasure of anger with moral affirmation. Psychological research on the Better Than Average Effect shows that individuals consistently rate themselves as more moral than others, a bias that appears strongest in ethical self-assessment. This tendency creates fertile ground for righteous anger, because moral

[36] Karnoscak, S. (2019) 'Our righteous anger addiction', Medium, 11 January. Available at: https://medium.com (Accessed: 16.01.2026).

disagreement is easily reframed as evidence of one's own virtue and the other's corruption. Online spaces intensify this dynamic by collapsing distance and context, encouraging users to interpret unfamiliar views not as differences but as threats to moral order. Within this framework, disagreement ceases to be epistemic and becomes existential. Opinions one finds objectionable are no longer merely mistaken but dangerous or evil. Familiar slogans about the moral duty to act against wrongdoing provide ethical justification for intolerance, reinforcing the belief that anger is not only permissible but obligatory. The individual who feels outrage can thus experience a double reward: emotional stimulation and moral self-confirmation. This combination helps explain why people often seek out conflict rather than stumble into it accidentally. Karnoscak argues that this process fosters a form of illusory moral superiority. Repeated engagement in outrage does not simply express ethical commitment; it actively constructs a moral identity defined by opposition. Social media platforms, through algorithms that privilege engagement and intensity, reward this behaviour with visibility and affirmation. As a result, anger becomes self-sustaining. Individuals follow political controversies obsessively, absorbing a steady stream of emotionally charged content that disrupts sleep, mood, and well-being, yet rarely produces proportionate action in the world beyond the screen. The text is careful not to deny that anger can play a constructive role in social change. Historically, anger has motivated collective movements that challenged injustice and expanded rights. The problem identified here is not anger itself, but its habitual cultivation as an end rather than a means. In online contexts, outrage often terminates in expression rather than transformation. Comment threads, performative denunciations, and symbolic gestures substitute for sustained political engagement, offering emotional release without structural consequence. This pattern, Karnoscak suggests, amounts to a form of emotional extraction. Individuals repeatedly sacrifice their emotional energy to cycles of outrage that benefit neither themselves nor the causes they claim to defend. Platforms profit from attention, while users internalise stress and antagonism. The pleasure of righteous anger masks its cost, encouraging participation even when individuals recognise its futility. The ethical response proposed is not withdrawal from moral concern but a recalibration of engagement. Choosing not to participate in rage-driven exchanges is framed as an assertion of agency rather than apathy. Emotional energy is finite, and constant exposure to outrage diminishes the capacity for empathy, creativity, and effective action. By recognising the addictive pull of righteous anger, individuals can begin to ask why certain encounters feel compelling and whether they serve genuine moral aims. The concluding reflection emphasises responsibility without determinism. Neurological reward mechanisms and digital architectures shape behaviour, but they do not eliminate choice. People retain the capacity to decide which emotions to indulge and which narratives to inhabit. Learning to step away from righteous anger does not entail moral indifference; it may instead enable more deliberate, proportionate, and effective forms of ethical action. In an online culture structured to monetise outrage, resisting the pleasure of righteous anger becomes a difficult but necessary moral discipline.

Righteous anger and self development

In his article[37] 'Righteous anger can bring out the best in us all', Michael Jensen argues that righteous anger is both a temptation and a moral resource, and that its value depends on whether

[37] Jensen, M. (2015). Righteous anger can bring out the best in us all. [online] Abc.net.au. Available at: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-06/jensen-why-we-love-rage/6002174 [Accessed 16 Jan. 2026].

it is channelled into responsibility rather than enjoyed as a private thrill.[1] Righteous anger can feel like the cleanest emotion: it arrives with certainty, with the sense that a wrong has been identified and that judgment is justified. That clarity can be intoxicating, especially because it offers an escape from ambiguity and self-doubt. The problem is not that outrage exists, but that it can become a form of entertainment, a way of tasting moral power without paying the cost of moral action. A small story captures this danger. A wedding day becomes overshadowed by a scheduling offence from another party, and a genuine grievance turns into a theatre of humiliation. The injury is real, yet the emotional energy is invested less in preserving joy than in savouring indignation. The episode matters because it is recognisable: indignation can become more attractive than the goods it claims to protect. This points to a broader psychological pattern. Righteous anger can offer pleasure precisely because it allows a person to feel superior, entitled, and safe from accusation. It places one in the role of judge rather than participant, finger-pointer rather than self-examiner. Digital culture intensifies this temptation. Online interaction supplies an endless stream of statements that can be framed as disgusting, ignorant, or dangerous. The platform logic rewards reaction, not reflection, and the quickest route to social visibility is often outrage. In that environment, moral anger becomes easy to access and hard to abandon. The thrill lies in the speed of condemnation, the rush of being on the ‘right side’, and the comfort of belonging to a righteous crowd. Even antagonistic conversations can become oddly pleasurable, because they provide drama, purpose, and a feeling of force. Yet the argument does not reduce anger to pathology. There are, undeniably, things worth being angry about. A moral life that refuses anger completely risks becoming passive in the face of injustice. The tradition invoked here treats anger as potentially legitimate when it is directed at real wrongs and when it refuses to normalise evil. The image of clearing the temple functions as a symbol of anger that is not merely personal irritation but moral protest, an anger aimed at defending what should not be violated. This is not rage for its own sake, but indignation tied to the protection of the vulnerable and the exposure of corruption. The central distinction is therefore between righteous anger and self-righteous anger. The first is oriented toward repair, justice, and responsibility; the second is oriented toward the pleasures of superiority. Self-righteous anger flatters the self. It reduces moral life to performance: the goal becomes not change, but the feeling of being correct. This is why moral anger can be misused as a substitute for action. A person can consume distressing news like a daily ritual, argue endlessly, sleep badly, and still produce nothing except more anger. When anger becomes a habit, it can drain attention and energy while pretending to be virtue. Anger, in this framework, should be judged by its direction and outcome. Does it awaken responsibility or merely entertain? Does it move the person toward the suffering of others or trap them in their own moral theatre? Proper anger should not soothe boredom, decorate identity, or function as a thrill. It should unsettle complacency and press toward meaningful repair. Its moral test is whether it is willing to become costly: to move beyond denunciation into solidarity, service, and concrete action. The ethical point is blunt: there is much to be legitimately angry about, but legitimacy is not enough. Righteous anger must be disciplined, not indulged. It can be a gift only when it becomes motivation for justice rather than a narcotic of superiority.

Righteous anger Vs. Entitled anger

In her article[38] 'Righteous Anger VS Entitled Anger', Sara Haile-Mariam proposes a sharp distinction between two forms of anger that is especially relevant for understanding moral emotion in networked societies, where anger circulates rapidly, publicly, and with uneven ethical consequences.[1] Righteous anger, on this account, functions as a signal that boundaries have been violated. It emerges in response to injustice, mistreatment, or enforced diminishment, and announces a misalignment between one's circumstances and one's worth. This form of anger does not arise from fragile ego but from an awareness of value. It communicates that something essential has been crossed and demands recognition, repair, or resistance. Within the framework of this book, righteous anger appears as a morally oriented emotion that connects inner evaluation with outward action. It is not passive feeling but an alert system that reveals where power has been taken, where dignity has been denied, and where silence would amount to complicity. This anger animates the truth-teller, the organiser, and the protester, not because it enjoys conflict but because it refuses erasure. When worked with consciously, righteous anger can become fuel rather than fire. It motivates correction, boundary-setting, and the reassertion of worth without collapsing into destructiveness. Crucially, righteous anger is not self-justifying by default. It requires labour. To work with anger means listening to what it points toward rather than discharging it indiscriminately. Beneath the heat of the emotion lie questions of responsibility: what must now be refused, what must be protected, what must be healed, and what must be created. This form of anger demands patience and care precisely because social norms often teach people to apologise for anger or suppress it altogether. When anger is denied expression, it does not disappear; it mutates. Righteous anger that is ignored or mishandled can harden into resentment or spill into harm. Treated with respect, however, it becomes instructive rather than corrosive. Against this stands entitled anger, which is defined not by violated boundaries but by assumed dominance. Entitled anger emerges from the belief that others exist in service to one's own comfort, identity, or worldview. It is an anger rooted in control, insecurity, and unexamined privilege. Where righteous anger responds to injustice, entitled anger manufactures threat. It frames difference as danger and disagreement as attack. This anger does not defend worth; it compensates for a lack of it. It relies on the degradation of others to stabilise a fragile sense of self. Entitled anger is therefore deeply extractive. It takes without building, punishes without repairing, and escalates without resolution. It converts shame into aggression and disconnection into hostility. Socially, it sustains oppressive structures by translating fear and insecurity into moralised hostility. Racism, misogyny, xenophobia, and other exclusionary practices function here not merely as beliefs but as emotional economies organised around entitled anger. This anger externalises inner fracture. Unable to reckon with vulnerability, it seeks targets onto which unacknowledged wounds can be projected. A crucial insight of this distinction is that entitled anger is not meaningless. It is also informative, though in a different way. It signals unresolved shame, internalised contempt, and alienation from one's own humanity. The danger lies in mistaking this signal for justification. When entitled anger is embraced as righteousness, it becomes destructive to both self and others. When it is recognised as symptom rather than mandate, it can reveal precisely where repair is needed. This does not excuse harm, but it clarifies its emotional logic. For a sociology of digital anger, the difference

[38] Haile-Mariam, S. (2018). Righteous Anger VS Entitled Anger. [online] Medium. Available at: https://medium.com/@sarahailemariam/righteous-anger-vs-entitled-anger-630c13b70986 [Accessed 16 Jan. 2026].

between these two forms is decisive. Online platforms reward speed, certainty, and intensity, conditions under which entitled anger thrives. Moral clarity is easily mimicked by outrage, and the performance of righteousness often substitutes for ethical responsibility. Righteous anger, by contrast, is slower and riskier. It demands accountability, self-examination, and a willingness to act beyond expression. In networked environments, the two are frequently confused, allowing entitled anger to masquerade as moral concern while hollowing out the substance of justice. The ethical task, then, is not to eliminate anger but to discern its orientation. Righteous anger is rooted in love and aims at restoration. Entitled anger is rooted in fear and aims at domination. One transforms by revealing worth; the other corrodes by denying it. Learning to distinguish between them is not only a personal discipline but a collective necessity in cultures where anger has become both currency and spectacle. Righteous anger can be a remedy, but only when it refuses the seductions of entitlement and remains anchored in responsibility rather than superiority.

What Does the Bible Teach About Anger?

In his article[39] 'What Does the Bible Teach About Righteous Anger?', Clement Harrold analyses the biblical tradition in order to distinguish between anger as a moral vice and righteous anger as a disciplined, ethically oriented response to injustice. This distinction is central to any sociology of moral anger, because religious traditions have long functioned as laboratories for regulating powerful emotions, setting limits on their expression while preserving their moral force. The biblical approach does not deny anger as such, but treats it as an ambivalent passion that must be governed by reason, intention, and proportionality. Scripture repeatedly warns against uncontrolled or hasty anger. Proverbs links slowness to anger with wisdom and self-mastery, while Ecclesiastes associates quick-tempered anger with folly. These texts do not portray anger as harmless energy but as a force that can easily dominate judgement and corrode moral perception. In this sense, anger becomes dangerous when it ceases to be responsive and instead becomes habitual, self-centred, or identity-defining. The moral problem is not simply feeling anger, but allowing anger to rule the self. At the same time, the Bible consistently refuses to condemn anger outright. The anger of God is a recurring theme across both Testaments, presented not as emotional instability but as a measured response to injustice, idolatry, and the destruction of communal life. Divine anger appears as a last resort, emerging only after patience, mercy, and opportunities for repentance have been exhausted. This framing is crucial: righteous anger is slow, reluctant, and purposeful, not impulsive or self-indulgent. It aims at restoration rather than domination. This tension between restraint and necessity leads to the biblical distinction between righteous and unrighteous anger. The Pauline injunction 'Be angry but do not sin' captures this balance with unusual precision. Anger may arise appropriately in response to wrongdoing, but it must not be allowed to fester, escalate, or become an independent moral authority. Once anger detaches from its moral object and begins to sustain itself, it becomes a gateway for distortion, resentment, and cruelty. In sociological terms, this anticipates the modern problem of anger economies, where outrage persists beyond the injustice that initially triggered it. The theological tradition sharpens this distinction further. Thomas Aquinas treats anger as a passion that is morally neutral in itself but becomes virtuous

[39] St. Paul Center. (2025). What Does the Bible Teach About Righteous Anger? - St. Paul Center. [online] Available at: https://stpaulcenter.com/posts/what-does-the-bible-teach-about-righteous-anger [Accessed 16 Jan. 2026].

or vicious depending on its conformity to reason. Anger that exceeds its proper measure, targets the wrong object, or seeks revenge rather than correction is morally defective. Yet Aquinas also insists that the absence of anger in the face of injustice can itself signal a failure of moral judgement. Indifference, in this view, is not moral superiority but moral blindness. Righteous anger, when properly ordered, becomes an expression of care for the good and for those harmed by its violation. The figure of Jesus intensifies this logic rather than softening it. The Gospels portray moments of explicit anger and indignation, particularly where exploitation, hypocrisy, or exclusion undermine the moral order. The cleansing of the temple, Jesus' anger at hardened hearts, and his indignation at the mistreatment of children all present anger as a response to violated norms of justice and dignity. Importantly, these episodes are not displays of loss of control. They are directed, purposeful, and bounded. Anger here functions as moral communication, not emotional overflow. At the same time, Jesus issues some of the strongest warnings against sinful anger, especially anger that dehumanises others or collapses into contempt. Anger that targets the person rather than the wrongdoing is portrayed as spiritually corrosive. This distinction is especially relevant for contemporary moral anger in digital environments, where persons are easily reduced to symbols, enemies, or avatars of evil. The biblical warning anticipates how moral anger can slide into moralised hatred when its object is no longer injustice but identity. From the perspective of this book, the biblical tradition offers an early grammar for regulating moral anger without extinguishing it. Righteous anger is defined not by intensity but by orientation. It is other-directed rather than self-centred, corrective rather than punitive, and temporally limited rather than self-reinforcing. It resists becoming a source of pleasure, status, or identity. Once anger begins to gratify the self or to function as proof of moral superiority, it ceases to be righteous, even if its original cause was just. This framework exposes a key dilemma in modern moral cultures. Contemporary outrage often mimics the language of righteousness while abandoning its restraints. Anger is accelerated, amplified, and monetised, stripped of the disciplines that once governed it. The biblical model insists that righteous anger must always remain accountable to mercy, proportionality, and the refusal of revenge. Without these limits, anger becomes indistinguishable from the evils it claims to oppose. Righteous anger, in the biblical sense, is therefore neither emotional indulgence nor moral weakness. It is a demanding posture that requires self-mastery, patience, and a willingness to let anger dissolve once justice has been pursued. In this way, Scripture does not offer a psychology of suppression but an ethics of containment, one that recognises anger as a necessary but dangerous resource in moral life.

Aristotle on anger management

Moshe Ratson examines Aristotle's account of balanced anger in 'The Wisdom of Aristotle on Anger Management', an article[40] on anger as a moral and psychological resource, arguing that anger becomes ethically valuable only when governed by proportion, judgement, and purpose. In 'Nicomachean Ethics', Aristotle examines anger not as a passion to be eliminated but as a morally significant emotion that must be governed by reason if it is to contribute to justice and human flourishing. Anger, for Aristotle, arises in response to perceived injustice or undeserved

[40] Ratson, M. (2023). The Wisdom of Aristotle on Anger Management | Psychology Today. [online] www.psychologytoday.com. Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-wisdom-of-anger/202303/the-wisdom-of-aristotle-on-anger-management.

slight, and this origin already situates it within the moral domain. The problem is not that people become angry, but that they become angry in the wrong way, at the wrong time, or for the wrong reasons. This insight is central to Aristotle's broader ethical framework, which understands virtue as a matter of balance rather than suppression, and places anger within the doctrine of the mean. Aristotle famously observes that anyone can become angry, but that to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way is neither easy nor common. This formulation captures the ethical challenge of anger. Anger is powerful, immediate, and bodily, yet it must be shaped by judgement if it is not to turn into destructiveness. The virtuous form of anger, often translated as 'good temper', lies between two vices: excess and deficiency. Excessive anger appears as irascibility, quickness to rage, and loss of proportion. Deficient anger, by contrast, manifests as a lack of spirit, an incapacity to respond to injustice, which Aristotle regards as servile and morally foolish. To feel no anger at all in the face of wrongdoing is not a sign of moral enlightenment, but of ethical failure. Within this framework, anger serves an important diagnostic function. It signals that something of value has been violated, whether dignity, fairness, honour, or rightful expectation. Anger alerts the moral agent to the presence of injustice and mobilises energy for response. Yet Aristotle is clear that this energy must be guided by reason. Anger that overwhelms judgement ceases to serve justice and becomes self-defeating. Reason does not extinguish anger; it disciplines it, aligning emotional force with ethical purpose. The idea of being angry for the right reason is therefore crucial. Aristotle does not equate virtuous anger with personal satisfaction, emotional release, or self-assertion. The purpose of justified anger is corrective rather than retaliatory. Its aim is to restore moral balance, to defend what ought to be defended, and to resist what ought not to be tolerated. Anger becomes vicious when it seeks humiliation, domination, or revenge, or when it latches onto trivial slights while ignoring genuine harms. Proper anger, by contrast, remains oriented toward the good, even when it involves confrontation or firmness. Equally important is Aristotle's insistence on proportion. Not every wrong demands the same intensity of response. A minor slight does not justify furious outburst, just as grave injustice should not be met with indifference. Proportionality ensures that anger does not escalate conflict unnecessarily or damage relationships beyond repair. In this sense, virtuous anger respects both the moral seriousness of the offence and the humanity of those involved. It avoids both passivity and cruelty, positioning the moral agent neither as victim nor tyrant. Timing also plays a decisive role. Aristotle recognises that even justified anger can fail morally if expressed at the wrong moment. Anger expressed too quickly may lack clarity; anger delayed too long may turn into resentment. The virtuous agent learns when speech will correct and when silence will prevent further harm. This sensitivity to context reflects Aristotle's broader rejection of rigid moral rules in favour of practical wisdom, or phronesis, which judges particulars rather than applying abstract formulas. The manner of expression further distinguishes virtuous from vicious anger. Anger need not be loud, humiliating, or violent to be effective. Indeed, uncontrolled displays often undermine the very authority they seek to assert. For Aristotle, the right way of expressing anger is one that preserves rational control and ethical orientation. Anger should never abandon reason, even at its most intense, because once reason is lost, anger ceases to serve justice and becomes mere impulse. Within the sociology of anger, Aristotle's account remains strikingly relevant. In contemporary moral outrage cultures, anger is often valued for its intensity rather than its judgement, its visibility rather than its proportionality. Aristotle offers a corrective to this dynamic by insisting that moral seriousness lies not in how strongly one feels, but in how accurately and responsibly one responds. Anger, in this sense, is not a performance but a practice, requiring discipline, reflection, and ethical

maturity. Aristotle's wisdom does not promise a world without anger, nor does it recommend emotional neutrality. Instead, it proposes anger as a morally educable force, capable of contributing to justice when governed by reason and capable of corroding social life when left unchecked. Anger is neither virtue nor vice by nature; it becomes one or the other through how it is understood, cultivated, and enacted. This vision situates anger not as an enemy of ethics, but as one of its most demanding tests.

2.5. Sociology of anger

Anger as social infrastructure

Scott Schieman's chapter[41] 'The Sociological Study of Anger: Basic Social Patterns and Contexts' in the 'International Handbook of Anger' (2010) provides a crucial sociological foundation for understanding anger not as a private psychological disturbance but as a patterned social phenomenon structured by status, roles, and institutions. This perspective is central to the present book's argument that, in digital environments, anger no longer merely reflects social conditions but increasingly operates as a distributed infrastructure that organises attention, identity, and collective action. Schieman begins from the observation that anger is among the most common and recognisable emotions in everyday life. People encounter it constantly, whether as actors, targets, or spectators, and its expression carries both destructive and mobilising potential. Sociology is concerned with anger precisely because it reveals how social arrangements generate, constrain, and normalise emotional responses. Anger sharpens perception, dramatizes injustice, and energises resistance, yet it also escalates conflict and corrodes trust when intensified, prolonged, or misdirected. This ambivalence makes anger an especially revealing indicator of social strain. A key contribution of Schieman's work lies in framing anger as part of the stress process. Anger is not random; it follows predictable social distributions shaped by age, gender, and class. These patterns form what he describes as a 'social epidemiology of anger'. Such an approach aligns closely with the argument advanced in Moral Outrage Networks: that emotions circulate through structured environments and are amplified or dampened depending on the communicative architecture in which they are embedded. Population-based surveys in the United States show that mild forms of anger, such as annoyance, have increased over time, while more intense anger remains relatively stable. This distinction is critical. Annoyance appears especially sensitive to environmental saturation, time pressure, and everyday friction. In pre-digital contexts, these irritants were spatially limited and episodic. In digital environments, by contrast, low-level provocations are constant, algorithmically curated, and socially contagious. The result is not necessarily more rage, but more frequent emotional activation, priming individuals for moralised interpretation of events. Age emerges as one of the most robust predictors of anger frequency. Younger adults report significantly higher levels of anger-related feelings and expressions than older adults. Schieman explains this not through biological decline but through changing social exposure. Younger people are more embedded in conflict-rich roles: employment precarity, childcare, time scarcity, and status competition. Older adults, by contrast, experience fewer daily provocations, greater emotional regulation, and reduced time pressure. In digital networks, however, these age gradients may flatten, as older users are increasingly drawn into the same outrage cycles as younger ones, suggesting a shift from role-based exposure to platform-based exposure. Gender

[41] Schieman, S. (2010). 'The Sociological Study of Anger: Basic Social Patterns and Contexts', in M. Potegal, G. Stemmler and C. Spielberger (eds), International Handbook of Anger. New York: Springer.

patterns further complicate the picture. While cultural stereotypes frame anger as a masculine emotion, empirical evidence is inconsistent. Women often report equal or higher frequencies of anger, particularly in domestic and caregiving contexts, yet face stronger sanctions for expressing it. Men, meanwhile, report greater emotional reserve but are more likely to externalise anger through aggression. In networked publics, these display rules are destabilised. Digital platforms reward visibility and intensity, eroding traditional norms of emotional restraint while simultaneously re-gendering outrage through moral framing, harassment, and reputational attack. Social class exerts a powerful influence on anger through exposure to hardship, perceived injustice, and control over life circumstances. Lower education and income are associated with higher levels of anger, particularly its more disruptive expressions such as yelling or losing control. Importantly, education functions not only as a resource reducing exposure to stressors but also as a cognitive tool shaping how anger is managed. The well-educated are more likely to reinterpret situations, seek resolution, or channel anger into strategic action. In digital environments, however, these advantages may be neutralised by algorithmic incentives that privilege immediacy over reflection. Taken together, Schieman's analysis demonstrates that anger is produced at the intersection of social position, institutional pressure, and everyday interaction. This insight underpins the broader thesis of 'Moral Outrage Networks': that contemporary digital systems do not merely transmit anger but reorganise its social logic. Anger becomes continuous rather than episodic, performative rather than situational, and moralised rather than negotiated. Sociology of anger, therefore, must now extend beyond roles and statuses to include platforms, metrics, and network effects as central determinants of emotional life.

Anger as social power

Scott Schieman's article[42] 'Anger' (2007) approaches anger as a socially patterned process shaped by power, control, and institutional contexts, a framework that becomes especially revealing when applied to digitally networked forms of moral anger. Anger is among the most familiar emotions in social life, yet its sociological importance lies not in its universality but in how it is provoked, interpreted, expressed, and managed under specific social conditions. Anger provides drama, explanation, and motivation, but it also functions as a mechanism through which social order, hierarchy, and legitimacy are contested and reaffirmed. In contemporary digital environments, these functions are amplified and reorganised rather than replaced. A central sociological insight is that anger is not merely an inner feeling but a process involving cognition, attribution, expression, and consequence. Anger arises when actors perceive obstruction, injustice, insult, or blameworthy harm, especially when these threats target identity, status, or moral standing. What distinguishes anger from emotions such as sadness is its outward orientation. Anger moves against others. It demands recognition, correction, or punishment. This makes anger particularly compatible with public communication systems, where visibility, response, and reaction are structurally encouraged. Anger includes a wide range of intensities, from mild irritation to full rage, and overlaps with related emotions such as frustration and resentment. Sociologically, this ambiguity is productive. It allows anger to be widely recognised and mobilised even when its causes are contested or unstable. In digital publics, this flexibility enables moral anger to circulate rapidly, attaching itself to events,

[42] Schieman, S. (2007) 'Anger', in Turner, J.H. (ed.) Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions. New York: Springer, pp. 493–515.

symbols, and narratives with minimal need for shared experience. Language and context supply the labels that transform discomfort into anger, and online environments continuously reproduce those labels through repetition, framing, and imitation. Anger is deeply social in its causes. Common sites of provocation include perceived injustice, unfair treatment, betrayal, incompetence, and threats to dignity. These sites are not randomly distributed but structured by work, family, neighbourhoods, and broader inequalities. Enduring demands, constraints, and underreward generate conditions in which anger becomes likely. In networked contexts, these structural pressures are not removed but reframed. They are translated into symbolic conflicts, moralised narratives, and personalised blame. Anger becomes detached from immediate interaction and redirected toward abstract enemies, institutions, or out-groups. A crucial sociological claim is that anger is a power emotion. It mobilises energy, asserts dominance, and signals potency. Those who express anger are often perceived as authoritative or entitled to act, which gives anger strategic utility. In digital environments, the threshold for expressing anger is lowered. Visibility and amplification can substitute for traditional forms of authority. Networked anger allows individuals with limited institutional power to perform dominance symbolically, even when material power remains unchanged. At the same time, anger is also triggered by powerlessness. When individuals experience loss of control but believe the situation is remediable and blameworthy, anger becomes a plausible response. Attribution is central here. Anger depends on the belief that someone is responsible and could have acted differently. Digital systems facilitate this process by simplifying causality, foregrounding blame, and rewarding accusatory expression. Moral anger thrives where responsibility is personalised and solutions appear morally obvious. The sense of control plays a key role in shaping anger processes. Individuals with higher perceived control may use anger instrumentally to influence others, while those with lower control may experience anger as a response to constraint and domination. In both cases, anger is tied to expectations of efficacy. Online environments sustain these expectations by offering immediate feedback, visibility, and the impression of impact. Even when outcomes do not change, expressive anger feels consequential because it produces recognition, alignment, and reaction. Anger also functions as a means of social control. Displays of anger communicate boundaries, enforce norms, and discipline behaviour. In networked publics, this function is intensified through collective enforcement, coordinated condemnation, and reputational sanction. Moral anger becomes a tool for regulating speech and conduct without formal authority. Its legitimacy depends less on proportionality than on perceived moral alignment and group endorsement. Seen sociologically, anger is best understood as a patterned process rather than a raw impulse. Its activation, expression, and consequences are shaped by social roles, power relations, and communication systems. In networked publics, anger is not simply more visible; it is structurally encouraged, symbolically rewarded, and embedded in the organisation of discourse. Studying anger in this form reveals how emotional life becomes infrastructure for authority, conflict, and moral ordering in contemporary societies.

The social architecture of anger

Kathryn J. Lively's chapter[43] 'The Sociology of Emotion' in *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociology, Volume 2: Specialty and Interdisciplinary Studies* (edited by Kathleen Odell

[43] Lively, K. J. (2019) 'The Sociology of Emotion', in Korgen, K. O. (ed.) The Cambridge Handbook of Sociology, Volume 2: Specialty and Interdisciplinary Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Korgen) explains why emotion cannot be treated as a private psychological by-product, because every stage of feeling, from its formation to its consequences, is patterned by social environments, cultural meanings, and structural inequalities. This starting point matters for any sociology of anger, because anger is not simply something a person has; it is something social life produces, directs, discourages, rewards, and sometimes monetises. The earlier dominance of psychological approaches, focused on cognition and neurology, left a gap by underplaying the settings in which emotions are learned, labelled, expressed, disciplined, and strategically deployed. Sociology of emotion develops by insisting that feelings are socially constructed and socially distributed. Emotions operate like senses that register what is at stake in a situation, but that registration is never neutral: norms define what should be felt, by whom, and when. A foundational organising model in this field treats emotion as an interlocking process that includes bodily responses, cognitive appraisal, expressive display, and linguistic labels. Because these elements interact, emotion becomes manageable in multiple ways, through reframing situations, adjusting displays, changing labels, or altering physiological states. Lively also emphasises that emotions can exist beyond clear cultural naming, appearing as recognisable bodily responses in images, rituals, or simulations even when a shared vocabulary is missing. That point becomes crucial in contemporary mediated environments, where people encounter and circulate affective cues faster than they can interpret them, and where new emotional blends can stabilise before language catches up. The field's theoretical roots stretch back to classical diagnoses of emotional syndromes in modernity, such as alienation, disenchantment, and anomie. Yet the distinctive move of modern sociology of emotion is to treat emotion as a social process in its own right. One major line of work highlights feeling rules, the historically variable expectations that instruct people how to feel in particular contexts. Those rules turn emotion into a moral technology: they permit some reactions, stigmatise others, and set the terms of belonging. Another line of theory foregrounds power and status as the deep coordinates of emotional life: compliance forced against one's will, and favours freely granted, generate predictable emotional outcomes when expectations are met or violated. These perspectives are often described as cultural and structural approaches, but the most productive work treats culture and structure as complementary, showing how symbolic meanings and institutional positions jointly organise emotional experience. Sociologists also differentiate types of emotions that matter for social order. Role-taking emotions, such as shame, guilt, embarrassment, sympathy, pride, and other moral feelings, arise from the capacity to see the self through the eyes of others and to anticipate evaluation. These emotions are not optional decoration; they are mechanisms of self-control that scale up into social control, because people avoid shame and seek pride, and thereby align behaviour with norms. A related distinction separates characteristic emotions, the emotions a role is supposed to produce when it is properly confirmed, from structural emotions, the shifting feelings that emerge in the real time of interaction and can quickly depart from what is expected. The mismatch between 'appropriate' feeling and lived feeling is not noise; it is evidence of social complexity. Emotional socialisation describes how people learn emotion rules across the life course, first through parents and teachers, later through peers, institutions, and workplaces. Emotion management then names the strategies used to align feeling with norms, whether by surface acting, deep acting, relabelling, or bodily modulation. When such management is sold for a wage it becomes emotional labour, a commodified requirement that is often gendered and racialised because some roles carry weaker status shields and absorb more hostility while being judged more harshly. In contemporary communication systems, these ideas extend naturally to the organised shaping of other people's emotions, not only by therapists, activists, and leaders,

but also by the routine engineering of attention, tempo, and visibility in digital settings. This is where a sociology of anger gains its contemporary edge: anger becomes easier to trigger, easier to display, and easier to circulate when settings reward intensity, simplify moral judgement, and encourage rapid shifts from fear to anger to pride. Finally, Lively's overview shows how emotion is woven into identity and social structure. Theories of identity confirmation treat emotion as a signal of deflection when the self is not recognised as expected. Equity, justice, and exchange theories similarly tie emotion to perceived fairness rather than objective conditions, implying that anger often follows interpretations of under-benefit, disrespect, or illegitimacy. For a sociology of anger, the implication is sharp: anger can be socially produced by patterned inequalities, but it can also be strategically organised by systems that shape perceptions, labels, and thresholds of offence, turning personal indignation into collective energy with institutional effects.

Social rage as collective emotion

Bonnie Berry's book[44] 'Social Rage: Emotion and Cultural Conflict' (1998) argues that rage is not only a private eruption but a socially organised force shaped by threatened expectations, cultural conflict, and struggles over power, and this framework translates directly into the problem of digital anger as a networked public phenomenon. The key distinction is between personal rage and social rage: personal rage may flare from intimate humiliation or injury, but social rage emerges when large-scale conditions, economic insecurity, demographic change, and institutional distrust are experienced as violations of entitlement and status. In contemporary media ecologies, that translation from condition to feeling is accelerated because platforms supply constant triggers, ready-made interpretations, and instant audiences, turning rage into a repeatable public performance rather than a rare breakdown. Social rage also travels across registers: it appears in spectacular violence, but it can be just as consequential when it is quiet and procedural, expressed through voting, hiring, policy preferences, and everyday acts of exclusion. That matters for digital contexts, because networked rage often operates without obvious 'rage' displays, functioning instead through selective sharing, sarcastic signalling, reputational attacks, coordinated pile-ons, and the steady circulation of moralised narratives that divide the world into victims and enemies. A second central mechanism is misattribution. Social rage is frequently aimed at symbolic and vulnerable targets rather than at the structural sources of insecurity. When people cannot easily confront abstract forces, the emotion is redirected toward visible groups framed as competitors, intruders, or corruptors of tradition. In networked environments, misattribution becomes a design feature: algorithms favour emotionally charged content, influencers specialise in converting diffuse frustration into identifiable villains, and communities bond through shared blame that feels clarifying. Rage therefore becomes socially useful even when it is factually inaccurate, because it supplies moral certainty and group cohesion. Berry also highlights the distortion effect of rageful expression: loud, vivid, hyperbolic messaging can seem numerically dominant, intimidating quieter majorities into silence and giving a minority the power of apparent consensus. Digital communication intensifies this distortion by rewarding repetition, outrage phrasing, and conflict escalation, producing the impression that 'everyone is furious' even when engagement represents a small, highly activated segment. The result is a feedback loop in which perceived prevalence legitimises further rage, and further rage increases perceived prevalence. Another

[44] Berry, B. (1998) Social Rage: Emotion and Cultural Conflict. New York: Garland Publishing.

crucial claim is that social rage is learned. It is acquired through socialisation and modelling, and it is reinforced by institutions that reward emotional certainty. In digital settings, this learning occurs at scale: people pick up templates for indignation, styles of accusation, and ritualised forms of moral condemnation, often without experiencing the original conditions that supposedly justify them. Rage becomes portable, detachable from direct experience, and easy to adopt as identity. Berry treats social rage as partly ineffective over the long run, because it exhausts participants and rarely produces stable solutions, yet it can be highly effective in the short run as an attention engine, a mobilisation tool, and a weapon of disruption. That short-term effectiveness is precisely what makes digital rage politically and economically valuable. Finally, Berry leaves room for the ambivalence of rage: moral anger can drive progressive change when it targets genuine injustice, but it can also become a reactionary defence of hierarchy when it targets equality itself. The analytic task is not to romanticise rage or pathologise it, but to track how it is produced, steered, amplified, and monetised as collective energy. In a networked public sphere, social rage is best understood as communication infrastructure: it organises meaning, recruits audiences, disciplines dissent, and converts uncertainty into moral drama, often faster than institutions can absorb or correct.

Political Anger and Networked Escalation

Roger Petersen and Sarah Zukerman's chapter[45] 'Anger, Violence, and Political Science' in the International Handbook of Anger argues that political science cannot properly explain violence without taking anger seriously as a causal mechanism, and that claim maps directly onto a sociology of digital anger where outrage is not only expressed but engineered, circulated, and stabilised through communication networks. The chapter begins from a simple observation: political violence is routinely described through concepts that are implicitly emotional, such as the hardening of identities, the heightening of ethnic salience, the escalation of tit-for-tat retaliation, and the problem of reconciliation after conflict. Yet these descriptions often avoid naming the emotion that does much of the explanatory work. Anger is central because it links appraisal to action: people become angry when a blameworthy actor is perceived to have committed an offensive act against the self or the group, and the action tendency of anger is punishment. Once this is acknowledged, many patterns that appear mysterious in rationalist models become intelligible as predictable social dynamics. The authors contrast this with dominant approaches in political science that privilege rational choice and large-n structural modelling. These frameworks can be useful for estimating conditions under which conflict becomes feasible, but they struggle with the lived mechanics of violence. Political violence features identifiable actors, moralised attributions of blame, long-term group relations, domination and subordination, intense disruption, distorted cognition, and shifting preferences that move from vengeance to fatigue and the desire to return to ordinary life. Rational choice tends to assume stable preferences and optimal belief formation, which makes it ill-suited for explaining why revenge suddenly overrides safety, why humiliation transforms into collective commitment, or why fear and anger reshape risk calculation. Large-n models can capture correlations between terrain, state capacity, or income and the onset of civil war, but they often flatten motivations and bracket the processes by which violence reorganises identity and

[45] Petersen, R. and Zukerman, S. (2010) 'Anger, Violence, and Political Science', in Potegal, M., Stemmler, G. and Spielberger, C. (eds) International Handbook of Anger: Constituent and Concomitant Biological, Psychological, and Social Processes. New York: Springer, pp. 561–574.

meaning. What the chapter contributes is a transferable framework: anger is not a vague mood but a structured package of cognitive antecedents, action tendencies, and predictable distortions. Once anger is activated, individuals become intuitive prosecutors who search for perpetrators, lower the threshold for attributing hostile intent, and treat ambiguous events as further evidence of blame. Anger amplifies itself through feedback loops in which blame increases anger and anger increases blame. Rumination prolongs this state by repeatedly reactivating the same emotional node, pulling old grievances and associated beliefs into the present. In political violence, this is not merely a private psychological habit: it becomes collective memory and narrative, reinforced through symbols, rituals, and daily reminders that keep the appraisal alive. This framework has immediate relevance for networked moral anger. Digital systems accelerate the move from appraisal to punishment by supplying constant cues of offense, rapid attribution, and low-cost punitive action. Anger's action tendency does not need to take the form of physical violence to function politically. It can become reputational violence, coordinated ostracism, harassment, doxxing, targeted reporting, or mass pressure on employers and institutions. The platform environment also magnifies anger's cognitive distortions. Risk estimates drop, confidence rises, and escalation becomes easier because the perceived cost of retaliation is reduced while the perceived certainty of guilt is increased. Anger heightens stereotyping and locks groups into simplified images of the other, which helps explain why polarisation hardens so quickly and why de-escalation is experienced as betrayal rather than prudence. A crucial methodological point in the chapter concerns temporal dynamics. Laboratory research often measures anger in minutes, but political anger linked to atrocity must be measured in months and years, because it is continually re-evoked by memory, proximity, and symbolic reminders. This longer duration is exactly what makes digital anger sociologically distinctive: networked reminders are built into the system. Old offenses remain searchable, replayable, and recyclable, producing recurrent spikes that slow decay and keep groups in a sustained state of moral mobilisation. The result is an affective economy in which conflict is maintained through recurrent reactivation, not continuous intensity. The chapter also clarifies why reconciliation policies focus on anger. States cannot easily cure trauma at scale, but they can attempt to reduce vengeance motivations by changing appraisals and weakening the perceived necessity of punishment. Punishment, truth-telling, apology, and reparations are treated as quenching mechanisms that may reduce anger by restoring status, correcting attribution errors, re-humanising offenders, and shifting responsibility away from victims. Read sociologically, these are not only moral gestures but attempts to interrupt the anger cycle by altering the cognitive inputs that sustain it. Taken together, the chapter provides a way to treat anger as infrastructure: a mechanism that shifts preferences, distorts information, restructures belief, and sustains escalation over time. In networked environments, these mechanisms become easier to trigger, easier to coordinate, and harder to quench, because the communication system itself rewards the emotional logic of prosecution and punishment.

Moral outrage as learned behaviour

William J. Brady's 2021 article[46] 'How social learning amplifies moral outrage expression in online social networks' demonstrates that moral outrage in digital environments is not merely

[46] Brady, W.J., McLoughlin, K., Doan, T.N. and Crockett, M.J. (2021). How social learning amplifies moral outrage expression in online social networks. Science Advances, 7(33). doi:https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abe5641.

a spontaneous emotional reaction but a learned and socially regulated form of communication shaped by platform design and network structure. The core contribution of this research is to show that outrage online behaves less like an inner moral impulse and more like a patterned social practice that spreads, stabilises, and escalates through learning mechanisms embedded in digital systems. The article begins from a well-established observation: moral outrage has long played a functional role in social life by motivating punishment, enforcing norms, and enabling collective action. What changes in online environments is not the existence of outrage, but the conditions under which it is expressed. Digital platforms remove many of the constraints present in face-to-face interaction and replace them with quantifiable feedback, persistent visibility, and algorithmic amplification. Under these conditions, outrage becomes especially adaptive as a communicative strategy. The authors identify two learning mechanisms that govern the expression of moral outrage online. The first is reinforcement learning. Users receive immediate and visible rewards in the form of likes, shares, and engagement when they express outrage. These rewards function as behavioural reinforcers, increasing the probability that the same expressive strategy will be used again. Importantly, the study shows that outrage-specific feedback predicts future outrage expression more reliably than feedback for negative sentiment in general. This indicates that outrage is not simply another form of negativity, but a distinct moral signal that platforms disproportionately reward. The second mechanism is norm learning. Digital users are embedded in social networks that display dominant expressive styles through timelines and feeds. By observing what others post, users infer what is appropriate, expected, or valued within their network. In ideologically extreme networks, outrage is more common and therefore becomes normalised. The study shows that individuals surrounded by more extreme networks express more outrage regardless of their own ideological position. This suggests that outrage is socially contagious not only because it is rewarded, but because it is perceived as the correct way to participate. Crucially, the interaction between reinforcement learning and norm learning reveals how outrage becomes infrastructural. When expressive norms are clearly visible, users rely less on direct feedback and more on imitation. In highly polarised networks, outrage no longer needs to be individually rewarded each time it is expressed, because it has already been internalised as the default mode of communication. Outrage shifts from being a tactic to being a baseline condition of participation. This finding has important implications for the sociology of anger. Outrage online is not best understood as a reflection of rising emotional intensity in society, but as a consequence of communicative incentives. Digital systems reward moralised content because it attracts attention, generates engagement, and sustains interaction. As a result, outrage becomes decoupled from lived moral experience. People may express outrage without necessarily feeling it intensely, producing a public sphere saturated with moral condemnation that exceeds actual emotional states. The article also helps explain why outrage appears resistant to fatigue in digital spaces. While emotional experience may be exhausting, expressive outrage is continually refreshed by feedback loops, archival visibility, and repeated provocation. Old grievances remain searchable and reusable, allowing anger to be reactivated without new injury. This creates the illusion of permanent moral crisis and reinforces polarisation by exaggerating perceptions of hostility across groups. From a structural perspective, the findings challenge the idea that platforms are neutral arenas for moral discourse. Platform design shapes what is learned, what is rewarded, and what becomes normative. Moral outrage emerges as a joint product of human psychology and technical architecture. It is neither fully engineered from above nor entirely spontaneous

from below, but produced through their interaction. In sociological terms, moral outrage functions as a form of moral currency in digital publics. It signals group loyalty, enforces boundaries, and converts moral positioning into visibility and status. Understanding outrage as a learned communicative behaviour rather than a raw emotion clarifies why it spreads so efficiently, why it escalates so rapidly, and why it is so difficult to reverse once embedded in networked environments.

Anger in modern social order

'The Sociology of Anger' part has treated anger not as a private eruption or a psychological residue of frustration, but as a patterned social force whose form, circulation and consequences are inseparable from communication systems, power relations and institutional design. The sociology of anger begins from a simple but often neglected premise: anger is never only felt, it is organised. It is elicited, named, justified, rewarded, suppressed and redistributed through language, norms and media. What changes historically is not the existence of anger but the structures that shape how it moves through society, who is authorised to express it, and what collective effects it produces. Across different analytical angles, a consistent picture emerges. Anger is a boundary-drawing emotion. It identifies blameworthy actors, signals violated expectations, and demands response. Because of this orientation, anger is uniquely suited to public life. It translates private grievance into shared moral drama and converts diffuse dissatisfaction into recognisable conflict. In pre-digital societies, this translation was constrained by proximity, reputation and time. Anger travelled slowly, decayed locally and was moderated by embodied consequences. In contemporary networked environments, those constraints weaken. Anger circulates as language, detached from immediate interaction, preserved as text, image or clip, and amplified through metrics that reward intensity. The sociological consequence is that anger increasingly functions as infrastructure rather than interruption. It is no longer merely a reaction within social systems but a mechanism through which those systems operate. Moral anger, in particular, becomes a reliable means of coordination among strangers. Shared indignation substitutes for shared experience. Repeated evaluative language replaces deliberation. Communities form less around stable commitments than around recurring objects of offence. This does not mean that moral anger is false or insincere. It means that its social role has shifted. Anger becomes predictable, reproducible and strategically valuable. A recurring theme has been the relationship between anger and power. Anger expresses potency, asserts status and communicates entitlement. Those who can display anger without sanction are often those who possess authority, while those who are targeted by anger experience it as domination. At the same time, anger also arises from perceived powerlessness when actors believe harm is remediable and blameworthy. Digital environments intensify both dynamics. They allow anger to be performed by those with little institutional power while simultaneously exposing individuals to mass condemnation with minimal protection. The result is a volatile field in which anger both redistributes and concentrates power. Another central insight concerns control and agency. Anger is closely tied to the sense that action matters. It promises efficacy, even when outcomes are symbolic. In networked publics, expressive anger offers an immediate sense of participation. Posting, sharing and condemning feel like moral action. This experiential reward helps explain why anger persists even when it fails to resolve underlying problems. Anger supplies meaning and identity in environments marked by complexity, abstraction and institutional distance. To signal what provokes anger is to signal who one is. This part has also shown why older models of political

communication struggle to account for these dynamics. The classical image of propaganda as deception imposed from above gives way to a distributed system in which publics actively produce, refine and circulate anger themselves. Outrage becomes a form of collective labour. Repetition no longer requires central authority. It emerges from synchronised attention, algorithmic reinforcement and social imitation. In this context, miscommunication is not a breakdown but a condition of operation. Noise, conflict and moral polarisation keep the system active. The broader implication is that contemporary societies are drifting toward regimes of anger management. Collective anger is alternately stimulated and pacified, amplified and forgotten, not to reach resolution but to regulate attention and loyalty. Moral conflict becomes continuous, while trust, patience and shared understanding erode. Public life takes on the appearance of intense moral engagement while remaining fragile in cooperation and responsibility. Anger unifies quickly but binds weakly. This does not lead to a call for the elimination of anger. Such a project would be neither possible nor desirable. Anger remains a vital moral signal, capable of drawing attention to injustice and motivating change. The sociological task is instead diagnostic. It is to understand how anger is shaped by communication infrastructures, how it is transformed into value, and how it is used to organise collective life. Only by recognising anger as a social technology can its effects be evaluated realistically. The sociology of anger therefore concludes with a paradox. Anger appears everywhere in contemporary public life, yet its meaning is increasingly standardised and its outcomes increasingly predictable. What looks like spontaneous moral reaction often follows rehearsed linguistic patterns. What feels like agency often feeds systems that thrive on perpetual indignation. To grasp this paradox is not to deny moral feeling, but to situate it within the structures that now govern how societies feel together. In the age of networks, anger is no longer simply expressed. It is engineered, circulated and managed, becoming one of the central forces through which modern social order is maintained and contested.

3. Manufacturing anger

'Rage is by no means an automatic reaction to misery and suffering as such; no one reacts angrily to a misfortune which is nobody's fault.'

Hannah Arendt, On Violence (1970)

3.1. The genealogy of hatred

How the Nineteenth Century Managed Anger

Peter Gay's book[47] The Cultivation of Hatred: The Bourgeois Experience from Victoria to Freud (1993) provides a foundational account of how modern societies learned to produce, regulate and weaponise anger, and it offers a crucial historical anchor for understanding the genealogy of anger developed in this chapter. Rather than treating aggression as a timeless instinct, the book shows how nineteenth-century bourgeois culture actively reorganised hostility into a durable social resource. Anger was not eliminated in the name of civilisation; it was refined, moralised and redistributed through institutions, rituals and emerging media infrastructures. This transformation marks a decisive stage in the long process by which anger became manufacturable. The bourgeois world inherited a deep suspicion of aggression, shaped

[47] Gay, P. (1993) The Cultivation of Hatred: The Bourgeois Experience from Victoria to Freud. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

by Christian moral doctrine and Enlightenment fears of chaos. Yet the same culture depended on aggression for competition, discipline and expansion. The solution was not repression but redirection. Anger was reclassified into acceptable and unacceptable forms, praised when it appeared as ambition, patriotism or moral zeal, condemned when it appeared as disorderly rage. This moral sorting made anger governable. Once hostility was declared inevitable, it could be organised rather than suppressed. This organisation coincided with a media revolution. The expansion of mass literacy, newspapers and serialised public debate allowed emotions to circulate far beyond their local origins. Anger could now be synchronised across dispersed populations, narrated as a shared experience and attached to collective identities. Conflicts were no longer isolated events but ongoing stories with recognisable villains, victims and moral lessons. In this sense, nineteenth-century culture did not simply express anger; it built the first large-scale infrastructures for its distribution. A key insight for the genealogy of anger is that bourgeois society specialised in disguising aggression. Hatred rarely appeared as naked violence. It was reframed as righteous indignation, civilisational defence, scientific authority or national duty. These moral alibis allowed destructive impulses to pass as responsibility. Imperial conquest, economic domination and political exclusion could be justified as progress rather than coercion. Anger became ethical before it became explicit. The ritualisation of aggression provides one of the clearest examples of this process. Practices such as the German Mensur duel transformed violence into character formation. By enclosing injury within strict rules, ceremonial language and public supervision, bourgeois culture claimed to civilise brutality. In reality, it rendered aggression repeatable and prestigious. Pain was converted into honour, wounds into social capital, and suffering into proof of belonging. The body itself became a medium through which loyalty and discipline were displayed. This ritual logic reveals how anger can be cultivated without continuous emotional intensity. The duellist did not need to feel rage; he needed to perform aggression correctly. What mattered was not spontaneous fury but trained readiness. Such practices produced durable dispositions: respect for hierarchy, admiration for controlled cruelty and a tendency to interpret conflict through honour rather than deliberation. These dispositions could later be mobilised on a mass scale. Nationalism provided the political amplifier for these emotional technologies. The same mechanisms that disciplined individual aggression enabled collective hatred. Media narratives taught populations how to feel together, how to recognise enemies and how to experience hostility as participation in a shared moral drama. Anger became a mode of belonging. Violence could be sanctified when framed as defence of the nation, purification of culture or fulfilment of destiny. The genealogy traced here shows that modern anger is neither purely biological nor merely ideological. It is infrastructural. It depends on institutions that teach when anger is justified, on rituals that reward its expression, and on media systems that render it visible and contagious. The nineteenth century marks the moment when anger became reproducible across time and space, no longer tied to immediate injury but sustained through narrative, symbol and repetition. For a study of manufactured anger, the significance of this historical moment lies in its legacy. The techniques developed to civilise hostility also ensured its survival. By turning anger into discipline, style and moral mission, bourgeois modernity created emotional forms that could be endlessly repurposed. What appears today as spontaneous outrage rests on a long genealogy of cultivated aggression, where anger learned to circulate, to moralise itself and to demand collective expression.

Licensed rage and modern masks

Peter Gay's study of bourgeois hatred in nineteenth-century Europe, published in 1993, frames this section's question: how did modern societies learn to convert anger into moral permission while keeping the performance of virtue intact? The core mechanism is alibi-making. Aggression is not defended as impulse or accident but redescribed as duty, realism, progress, even care. These permissions do not merely excuse hostility; they organise it, giving anger approved routes of circulation and teaching populations whom to patronise, exclude, exploit or destroy without feeling criminal. The result is a disciplined hatred: cultivated, stylised, and socially rewarded. The most influential alibi is the apotheosis of conflict. Struggle becomes law. Public life learns to speak as if competition were the grammar of existence itself, as if history and nature were perpetual battlefields. This does not invent aggression; it gives aggression metaphysics. Once conflict is framed as necessity, moral doubt can be dismissed as naivety. Anger becomes respectable because it appears aligned with how the world really works. In such a frame, mercy looks like sabotage, restraint looks like weakness, and solidarity looks like sentimental fiction. Yet the doctrine's power lies in its portability rather than its consistency. The same vocabulary can legitimise opposite projects. One moment it sanctifies laissez-faire, the next it rationalises empire, then it explains away misery as fate. Its slogans function like emotional solvent: they dissolve scruple wherever scruple threatens advantage. That is why this alibi matters for a genealogy of manufactured anger. The point is not a coherent worldview but an adaptable licence, a rhetorical tool that opens access to a reservoir of hostility while allowing the bearer to experience himself as principled. This licence does not remain external. Bourgeois life is marked by oscillation: permission to strike, followed by anxiety about the blow. The same culture that authorises aggression also sharpens conscience. Guilt does not cancel the alibi; it often strengthens it by intensifying the need for justification. Self-laceration becomes the private cost of public permission, producing a rhythm in which anger is periodically discharged outward and then turned inward as remorse, only to seek new moral clothing for the next discharge. Race operates as one of the most efficient technologies for such clothing. The hostile Other is elevated into a category that looks objective, stable and measurable. The emotional reward is simplicity: the world divides into the fit and the unfit, the civilised and the dangerous, the deserving and the doomed. This division offers relief from ambiguity, especially when modernity produces anxiety, humiliation, demographic change, economic turbulence, and perceived cultural decline. The alibi works because it makes contempt feel like knowledge. When evidence disrupts the hierarchy, criteria are adjusted and measurements reinterpreted. Inquiry becomes immunisation, because the purpose is not truth but permission. Once racial permission is established, distance and bureaucracy do the rest. Colonial spaces become laboratories where cruelty can be narrated as discipline and terror as pedagogy. At home, law can convert prejudice into policy, making hatred appear procedural rather than passionate. In both cases, the alibi is institutional: newspapers, schools, courts and sermons repeat the story until it becomes reflex. Anger is no longer tied to direct injury. It is sustained by narrative, by classification, by constant rehearsal. Manliness supplies a parallel alibi, less dependent on scientific costume and more on honour's inherited theatre. Bourgeois culture democratises a warrior ideal and relocates it into new stages: the school, the office, the colony, the courtroom, the market. Aggression is praised as character; endurance becomes proof of virtue; softness becomes moral suspicion. Because the ideal is elastic, it becomes useful. Manliness can mean restraint or domination, dignity or violence, tenderness or contempt. That elasticity makes it a powerful emotional regulator. Insecurity is reinterpreted as firmness, fear as realism, vulnerability as shame. Anger then flows outward as a performance of strength, and

cruelty can appear as moral hygiene. Across these alibis, a single structure persists: hostility is displaced from personal motive to impersonal necessity. Nature, history, race, honour and freedom are invoked as superior authorities that relieve responsibility. That relief is precisely what allows anger to scale. When anger is narrated as duty, it becomes shareable; when it becomes shareable, it becomes infrastructural. The nineteenth century's achievement was to make hatred feel clean, and therefore repeatable, until it resembled common sense rather than moral failure.

Humanitarian discipline machines

Peter Gay's historical analysis of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, developed in his 1993 study of hatred and moral regulation, provides the point of departure for understanding how humanitarian reform transformed punishment into a refined technology of anger rather than its abolition. This chapter follows the genealogy of discipline as a mechanism through which modern societies learned to manage aggression by embedding it within institutions that claimed benevolence, rationality and care. The central paradox is that humanitarianism did not neutralise hatred. It reorganised it, converting punitive desire into procedural necessity and moral expertise. Victorian penal reform began as a revolt against spectacle and excess. Enlightenment doctrines promised to replace cruelty with reason, vengeance with proportionality, and passion with calculation. Yet reform advanced unevenly and hesitantly. Children, the poor and the socially marginal remained subject to routine brutality long after humanitarian ideals had entered public discourse. Courts continued to sentence the destitute young as if responsibility were self-evident, even when judges acknowledged the injustice. Anger did not disappear from punishment; it was displaced into habit, law and administrative routine. The reformist conscience often oscillated between pity and compulsion. Magistrates and legislators recognised the futility of whipping children only to return them to hunger and exposure, yet they persisted because institutional practice offered no alternative. This is a crucial moment in the genealogy of manufactured anger. Punishment no longer required personal malice. It operated automatically, justified by precedent and necessity. Responsibility migrated from individuals to systems. New institutions embodied this shift. Reformatories, industrial schools and prisons were designed to replace raw violence with discipline, isolation and routine. These spaces promised rehabilitation but frequently produced humiliation, despair and hardened identities. Solitary confinement, silence and forced labour were defended as humane precisely because they avoided physical spectacle. Pain was rendered invisible, psychological and continuous. Anger became infrastructural, built into architecture and schedules rather than expressed openly. The prison emerged as a factory of discipline, aimed less at moral conversion than at behavioural standardisation. Reformers believed conduct could be reshaped through environment, repetition and control. This belief carried an implicit pessimism about human nature. Criminality was treated as contagious, passion as dangerous, association as corrupting. The solution was separation and surveillance. In this model, punishment no longer answered a specific offence but produced a compliant subject shaped by bourgeois virtues of regularity, self-control and obedience. Humanitarian rhetoric often masked this transformation. Severity was repeatedly baptised as kindness. Disciplinary figures insisted that isolation preserved health, silence restored reflection, and pain corrected character. Even critics of capital punishment could endorse permanent confinement or sensory deprivation. The language of care coexisted seamlessly with the practice of coercion. Hatred survived by adopting the vocabulary of improvement. The alliance between law and emerging human sciences intensified this

process. Psychiatry and criminology promised to replace moral outrage with diagnosis, yet they frequently supplied new grounds for exclusion. The classification of offenders into types allowed punishment to appear objective, scientific and inevitable. Those deemed reformable were subjected to correction; those labelled irredeemable were abandoned to elimination or perpetual containment. Anger was no longer framed as revenge but as protection of society. This logic reached its most refined form in debates over responsibility and insanity. Legal systems increasingly acknowledged diminished control and pathological impulse, but this recognition did not soften discipline. It reorganised it. Treatment replaced punishment in language, while coercion remained intact in practice. The offender became an object to be managed, studied and neutralised. Hatred was translated into expertise. What emerges from this history is not the triumph of mercy but the professionalisation of punishment. Humanitarian reform narrowed the expression of anger without dissolving its function. The pleasures of retribution were exchanged for the satisfactions of management, diagnosis and control. Punishment ceased to be theatrical and became administrative. This shift made aggression more durable, not less, because it embedded hostility within systems that no longer experienced themselves as hostile. For a study of manufactured anger, the lesson is clear. Modern societies do not overcome hatred by moral enlightenment alone. They redesign it. Humanitarian discipline transforms aggression into routine, rendering it less visible and more efficient. The prison, the reformatory and the asylum are not simply instruments of care. They are technologies through which anger is stabilised, legitimised and reproduced under the sign of civilisation.

Pain as moral engine

Peter Gay's 1993 account of bourgeois hatred helps explain why nineteenth-century corporal punishment functioned less as a crude remnant of brutality than as a disciplined technique for manufacturing anger while calling it virtue. By the middle decades of the century, flogging began to trouble respectable conscience almost as much as the gallows, not because pain vanished from daily life, but because its moral packaging started to look suspicious. Domestic ideology had long crowned the father as sovereign and treated the rod as character-forming, a routine proof that authority existed. Sensibilities slowly shifted, yet familiar culture continued to normalise beatings as household humour and schoolroom common sense, suggesting that the problem was never ignorance of cruelty but the persistence of an emotional habit: power repeatedly reaffirmed through sanctioned pain. What appears at first as simple discipline reveals a secret curriculum. Beatings in popular stories are rarely responses to grave wrongdoing; they are triggered by inconvenience, clumsiness, noise, defiance, or the adult's impatience. The gesture becomes ritual: hand reaches for cane, body is corrected, order is restored, and the adult experiences a moral aftertaste of righteousness. Even unjust punishment can be excused in advance, as if the child must pay for offences not yet discovered. In that logic, pain is not an unfortunate tool but a preventative ideology, making authority feel omniscient and therefore unquestionable. The child learns that innocence offers no protection, only submission does. That is a powerful method of manufacturing anger because it teaches resentment and fear while forbidding their expression. Public defenders of flogging in Britain and the United States often described the act as reluctant self-sacrifice, insisting that the blow hurts the teacher more than the pupil. This formula performs moral laundering. It transforms coercion into charity and converts aggression into a badge of responsibility. The adult's pleasure, irritation, or need for domination is hidden behind the language of duty. Pain is framed as purification, a cleansing

that improves both the victim and the executioner. Such rhetoric matters for the genealogy of anger because it shows how cruelty becomes compatible with moral identity. Hatred need not look like hatred when it wears the mask of care. Opposition to corporal punishment grew louder in the mid-century, and critics increasingly treated flogging as pathology rather than pedagogy. The argument was not only that beating fails, but that it gratifies. The disciplinarian begins to resemble an addict of correction, a person who seeks the moral thrill of inflicting pain and then calls that thrill character building. Here the modern theme of manufactured anger becomes visible: aggression is not simply released; it is given a script that makes it socially legible and therefore repeatable. Institutions preserve the script because it grants jurisdiction. Teachers' defence of the cane was not merely conservative belief but professional sovereignty. To surrender the rod was to surrender a miniature monopoly of violence, the right to produce obedience through fear. The same anxiety appears in continental debates where corporal punishment is praised as the cure for softness and condemned as a class weapon. The stick is often reserved for servants, apprentices, and pupils, while elites protect themselves from bodily correction. This hypocrisy exposes the political economy of pain: discipline is distributed downward, and those who receive it are told to interpret humiliation as moral education. The result is not moral formation but the reproduction of hierarchy through embodied lesson. The child, the poor student, the apprentice learns that authority is permitted to hurt, and that suffering is the price of belonging. Elite schools preserved flogging even as manners became more delicate. Foreign observers could recoil at the indecency of highly paid headmasters acting as executioners, yet inside the closed emotional economy of such institutions, punishment became memory, loyalty, and identity. The idolised tyrant is remembered with fear mixed with attachment, and the scars of adolescence can later return as the texture of desire. By the late nineteenth century, psychiatric language existed to name the suspicion that pain could be eroticised, and the boundary between classroom discipline and private fantasy became harder to deny. The rod migrates. What begins as moral technology can become sexual script, and what begins as education can become appetite. The same period also shows a parallel re-description of violence against the self. Suicide gradually shifts from sin and crime to madness and then to social symptom. That re-description undermines older alibis for punishment by substituting diagnosis for condemnation. Yet diagnosis does not end aggression; it often relocates it into institutional management. Across flogging, sexual violence, and self-destruction, the unsettling recognition emerges that aggression is not an external enemy of civilisation but one of its companions. The bourgeois century tried to seal that recognition behind pedagogy, law, and science, but the pleasures of pain repeatedly surfaced, revealing how discipline can manufacture anger while pretending to cure it.

Aggression that laughs

Peter Gay provides a useful point of entry for understanding how nineteenth-century laughter functioned as a disciplined form of aggression rather than a harmless diversion. In the genealogy of manufactured anger, wit occupies a distinctive position: it allows hostility to circulate socially while appearing playful, intelligent, and civilised. The very language used to describe humour betrays this function. Wit cuts, bites, slashes. Laughter becomes a weapon that does not look like a weapon. Nineteenth-century psychology repeatedly described humour as an assertion of superiority. Laughter marks a momentary elevation of the self over another, a symbolic victory that requires an object of derision. This structure matters because it aligns humour with domination. Even when no physical harm is done, the social effect is real.

Someone is diminished, exposed, or expelled from dignity. Laughter creates instant communities of insiders while designating outsiders as ridiculous. It is aggression that binds. The bourgeois fascination with humour was therefore not accidental. A culture that prided itself on self-control, moral hygiene, and restraint required substitute channels through which hostility could be expressed. Wit offered exactly that. It enabled the release of contempt, envy, resentment, and revenge without violating the norms of respectability. One could wound while smiling, punish while entertaining, and deny cruelty by appealing to taste. Aggression learned to speak elegantly. This duality explains why laughter oscillates so easily between charm and cruelty. Comic forms often appear innocent, even childish, yet they regularly harbour violent fantasies. Nonsense verse, light opera, and farce allowed Victorian audiences to enjoy scenes of execution, humiliation, cannibalism, and punishment without moral discomfort. The mask of absurdity neutralised responsibility. Violence became funny precisely because it was framed as unreal, exaggerated, or playful. Yet the pleasure it generated was unmistakably real. Psychological accounts of the period recognised this ambiguity. Laughter was described as degrading, humiliating, or corrective. Ridicule punished deviation from social norms more efficiently than law, because it recruited the crowd. Shame, not pain, became the instrument. In this sense humour functioned as informal discipline, enforcing conformity while pretending merely to amuse. Society avenged itself through jokes. This logic is central to the manufacture of anger. Wit does not simply express aggression; it trains it. Repeated exposure to ridicule teaches audiences how to recognise targets, how to enjoy their diminishment, and how to align emotionally with power or majority sentiment. The joke instructs feeling. It shows whom one may laugh at, and therefore whom one may despise. Over time, these lessons become habitual, embedded in taste rather than argument. Freud's analysis clarified why jokes are so effective. Humour allows forbidden thoughts to bypass censorship. Hostility that would be unacceptable if stated directly becomes permissible when condensed into wit. The pleasure lies not only in the content but in the successful evasion of restraint. Laughter rewards the speaker and the audience simultaneously. In bourgeois culture, where overt aggression was increasingly regulated, wit served as a safety valve that preserved hostility by transforming it into pleasure. Satire represents the most self-conscious form of this mechanism. It presents itself as moral therapy, exposing hypocrisy, stupidity, and abuse of power. Yet satire depends on injury. It requires a victim to be dissected publicly. The satirist often claims to operate on behalf of reason or humanity, but the method remains aggressive. The scalpel cuts. Whether the wound heals or festers is never guaranteed. Nineteenth-century political humour illustrates both the power and the danger of this form. Caricature, parody, and irony became tools for attacking authority when other avenues were closed. Jokes could circulate where pamphlets could not. Yet the same techniques could be absorbed by the system they criticised. Mockery became safe when staged within controlled venues, softened by fantasy, music, or exaggeration. Aggressive laughter could entertain the very classes it targeted, neutralising its threat. Across these domains, laughter appears as a technology for managing anger. It neither suppresses hostility nor releases it indiscriminately. It refines it, stylises it, and distributes it socially. Wit allows aggression to persist under the sign of intelligence and taste. It teaches people how to enjoy domination without acknowledging it as such. For a genealogy of anger, the lesson is clear. Modern societies did not eliminate cruelty by civilising manners. They relocated it into forms that feel clever, justified, and pleasurable. Laughter with teeth remains one of the most efficient ways to wound while denying the wound. It is aggression that smiles and therefore endures.

Disciplined Minds, Unruly Passions

Gay's analysis of bourgeois culture offers a starting point for understanding how the nineteenth century transformed self-control from a moral ideal into a generator of anxiety, resentment, and ultimately collective anger. Between Waterloo and Sarajevo, Western societies produced an unprecedented flood of advice literature, a vast instructional machinery devoted to shaping conduct, emotions, and inner life. Manuals, sermons, tracts, edifying novels, and popular medical texts taught people how to marry, raise children, work efficiently, manage desire, speak politely, and remain healthy. This was not a marginal genre but a central cultural industry, reflecting a deep conviction that human beings required constant guidance in order not to become dangerous to themselves and others. The scale of this advisory culture reveals a society haunted by instability. Rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, secularisation, and political mobilisation produced a sense that instincts were loosening and authority weakening. Advice promised containment. It offered techniques for governing the self at a time when external restraints appeared fragile. Yet this promise carried an implicit threat. If self-control had to be taught so relentlessly, then the self was assumed to be volatile, impulsive, and potentially violent. Anger, desire, and ambition were treated as forces that must be channelled or neutralised before they erupted. The core doctrine was simple and relentless. Self-control was elevated into the supreme virtue, the mark of civilisation itself. Reason was tasked with ruling appetite, discipline with mastering impulse, restraint with proving moral worth. Temperance movements exemplified this logic, but it extended far beyond drink. Sexuality, speech, spending, posture, tone of voice, even facial expression became sites of regulation. Health was redefined as moral evidence, a visible sign that the individual had successfully governed inner chaos. Anger, in particular, was framed as a failure of character. The disciplined subject learned silence, delay, and habitual restraint, converting emotional energy into routine. This ethic borrowed its metaphors from commerce and industry. Character was an investment, habits were capital, time was money. Selfhood became a project of management. Even fiction participated in this pedagogy, presenting success as the reward of perseverance, order, and emotional economy. Idleness, excess, and impulsivity were reclassified as pathologies rather than vices. The ideal individual was not passionate but regulated, not expressive but reliable. Yet the culture of advice contained its own contradiction. By the late nineteenth century, the same societies obsessed with self-mastery were diagnosing epidemics of nervous exhaustion, irritability, insomnia, and anxiety. Neurasthenia became the emblematic disorder of the age, often attributed to speed, technology, and information overload. A different interpretation soon followed. The problem was not too much stimulation, but too much restraint. Neurosis appeared as the psychic cost of enforced silence, repression, and moral overcontrol. From this angle, obsessional behaviour looked like a distorted mirror of bourgeois virtue. Rituals multiplied where order was praised, doubt replaced confidence where reflection was exalted, and compulsive labour caricatured the ethic of productivity. The neurotic did not rebel against discipline; he drowned in it. The very techniques designed to tame aggression turned inward, producing anxiety, guilt, and self-surveillance. Anger did not disappear. It was redirected against the self. This internalisation of aggression had political consequences. A population trained to restrain open hostility did not become harmless; it became volatile. Repressed anger accumulated, seeking release in sanctioned forms. Advice culture promised freedom through discipline, but often delivered dependency on rules and authorities. The individual learned to obey, not to judge. When external permission arrived, restraint could collapse abruptly. The events of August 1914 exposed this fault line. Decades of moral training in patience, self-command, and delayed gratification evaporated in a surge of collective enthusiasm for war.

Hatred suddenly appeared not as vice but as duty. Nationalism offered what advice culture had denied: permission. Crowds rejoiced, dissenters were shamed, and intellectuals bent learning to mobilisation. The same societies that had preached emotional hygiene now indulged in moral intoxication. This rupture does not mean that nineteenth-century self-discipline was meaningless. It shows instead that the manufacture of anger and the governance of emotion were always unstable achievements. Self-control, when absolutised, became brittle. It produced not calm subjects but anxious ones, primed for release when a legitimate outlet appeared. The bourgeois attempt to civilise aggression succeeded for long periods, but it also created the conditions for its catastrophic return. Discipline did not abolish passion. It stored it.

Cultivated anger (modern order)

Peter Gay's interpretation of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture frames the problem this section rethinks: how aggression came to be understood not merely as instinctual danger but as something that could be shaped, redirected and socially engineered. Nineteenth-century observers were strikingly confident that human beings were aggressive by nature. From materialist physiology to early psychology, hostility appeared as a constant of the species. Even Freud's initial hesitation to elevate aggression to the status of a primary drive only underscores how pervasive the assumption had become. Hostile impulses seemed to infiltrate thought, language and action with stubborn regularity. Later debates complicated this certainty. Ethological theories emphasised innate aggression as an evolutionary surplus that demanded discharge, while sociological and educational theories pushed in the opposite direction, celebrating the malleability of the individual and the formative power of environment. Each position captured part of the truth and distorted the rest. A purely biological account cannot explain the dramatic historical variation in how anger is expressed, legitimised or suppressed. A purely social account risks reducing the human subject to a passive product of norms and institutions. Aggression resists such simplification because it occupies the unstable space between impulse and invention. This instability is precisely what made aggression so central to nineteenth-century social thought. Human beings appeared simultaneously pliable and refractory. They could be trained, disciplined and instructed, yet they also retained capacities that escaped conscious control. Freud's enduring contribution lies less in any final theory of drives than in his insistence on this tension. Aggression, in his view, was not a treasure of adaptation but a standing threat to social survival, one that required constant cultural labour to contain. War did not teach him this lesson; everyday speech, dreams and slips already revealed how easily hostility surfaced beneath civilised routines. The controversy surrounding the later concept of a death drive illustrates the limits of theoretical resolution. Many rejected the idea as speculative, yet no consensus replaced it. Others abandoned the search for a single aggressive source altogether and described aggression as a loose constellation of behaviours unified not by origin but by effect. Violence, domination, seduction, neglect and humiliation arise from different motives, yet converge in their capacity to harm. This pluralism aligns more closely with historical analysis, which encounters aggression not as a unitary force but as a repertoire of practices embedded in specific contexts. What matters for the genealogy developed in this book is not whether aggression is innate or learned, but how societies organise it. Aggression can destroy, but it can also build. Mastery, ambition, technical competence and creative transformation all draw on aggressive energy. Nineteenth-century culture recognised this ambivalence and sought to exploit it. The same impulse that threatened order could be harnessed for work, reform and expansion. Aggression was not eliminated; it was redistributed

across acceptable domains. This redistribution required cultural form. Rituals, institutions and narratives taught individuals when anger was legitimate and where it should be directed. Bourgeois society cultivated hatred precisely because it feared uncontrolled violence. By providing scripts for hostility, it reduced unpredictability while preserving intensity. The duel, the courtroom, the press campaign, the nationalist myth and the disciplinary institution all exemplify this logic. Aggression became synchronised. Individuals no longer hated in isolation but participated in collective moods sustained by shared symbols and justifications. The crucial transformation is therefore structural. Aggression ceased to be treated primarily as moral failure or instinctual eruption and became a resource to be managed. Anger could be summoned in moments of crisis, mobilised to enforce hierarchy, or redirected toward external enemies when internal tensions threatened cohesion. Hatred acquired timing, rhythm and legitimacy. It became infrastructural. This insight reframes the meaning of progress in the nineteenth century. Roads, industries, empires and nations were not built despite hostility but often through it. Rage supplied energy where consent faltered. Hatred simplified complexity, unified fractured populations and justified sacrifice. War, in this light, appears less as a collapse of modernity than as one of its accelerations, a moment when cultivated aggression was released at scale. The unsettling conclusion is that aggression cannot be civilised into disappearance. When disciplined and planned, it survives in more durable and contagious forms. Moral responsibility therefore extends beyond individual acts of violence to the systems that decide in advance that hatred will be useful. The nineteenth century bequeathed not only ideologies and institutions but emotional infrastructures capable of manufacturing rage on demand. Whether this capacity should be counted as progress remains the unresolved question at the heart of modern civilisation.

3.2. The grammar of outrage

The Political Economy of Trust

Drawing[48] on 'The Economic Policy of Online Media: Manufacture of Dissent' (2024), this section examines the revival of the term ‘Lügenpresse’ not as a relic of extremist rhetoric but as a linguistic mechanism within the contemporary manufacturing of moral anger. In the German case, accusations of a ‘lying press’ function less as empirical claims about journalistic falsity and more as grammatical cues that organise outrage, suspicion and collective resentment within a fragmented public sphere. Germany offers a particularly revealing context because of its historical transition from a totalitarian communication system based on enforced consensus to a liberal-democratic model grounded in openness, plurality and dialogue. After reunification, the expectation was that the abolition of censorship would eliminate the need for any form of manufactured agreement. Citizens would negotiate meaning, legitimacy and truth through free discussion in the public sphere. Yet this transition exposed an unanticipated problem. When consensus is no longer imposed, dissent does not simply disappear into rational deliberation. It becomes a communicative resource, capable of being amplified, staged and monetised. Within

[48] Ayolov, P. (2024). The Economic Policy of Online Media: Manufacture of Dissent. London: Routledge.

this environment, the term ‘Lügenpresse’ operates as a compressed moral judgement. It does not argue that particular facts are false. Instead, it asserts a prior ethical betrayal: that the media as an institution has violated its obligation to speak honestly on behalf of the public. The accusation thus bypasses evidential debate and moves directly to moral condemnation. This shift is crucial for understanding outrage as grammar rather than emotion. Once the label is applied, every omission, delay or editorial decision becomes retroactively readable as deception. The structural roots of this dynamic were already visible in the early post-unification period. Henning Rohl’s analysis of German television journalism described how the disappearance of overt censorship did not eliminate pressure toward conformity but relocated it into subtler forms of staging, selection and moral signalling. Journalists increasingly presented personal interpretations as public opinion while dissenting perspectives were marginalised through ridicule or isolation. In this environment, the pursuit of conflict, negativity and spectacle gradually eroded trust, producing cynicism within newsrooms and suspicion among audiences. Communication remained formally free, yet increasingly detached from shared responsibility for social cohesion. These tendencies intensified with the rise of digital media, where attention is scarce and emotional arousal becomes a competitive advantage. The publication of Udo Ulfkotte’s allegations regarding journalistic collusion with political and intelligence elites, regardless of their contested status, further destabilised confidence in mainstream outlets. The popularity of such claims matters less than their communicative effect. They provided narrative confirmation for a growing belief that institutional media conceal rather than reveal reality. In this sense, conspiracy discourse and official journalism entered a feedback loop, each reinforcing the other’s credibility problems. The events surrounding the 2016 Cologne assaults marked a critical moment in this process. Delayed and incomplete reporting by public broadcasters, justified retrospectively as an attempt to prevent social unrest, activated precisely the moral grammar the media sought to neutralise. When journalists later admitted to editorial failure, the confession did not restore trust. Instead, it validated the accusation that information had been deliberately withheld. The word ‘Lügenpresse’, already circulating within movements such as PEGIDA, acquired renewed plausibility. Moral outrage was no longer marginal but structurally embedded in public debate. Empirical data confirms the consequences of this shift. Declining trust in mainstream media correlates with increased reliance on online sources characterised by weaker regulation and stronger incentives to provoke anger. Here outrage is not a by-product but a business model. The principle that ‘angry people click more’ transforms moral indignation into measurable value. Language becomes optimised for escalation rather than understanding, and distrust itself becomes a reproducible commodity. What emerges is a paradox central to the grammar of outrage. Practices intended to preserve social peace through selective silence produce the very fragmentation they aim to prevent. Attempts to manage moral risk through omission generate suspicion, while transparency after the fact appears as proof of manipulation. In this environment, trust cannot be strategically engineered without reinforcing its absence. The German experience demonstrates that even highly regulated and ethically self-conscious media systems are vulnerable to this dynamic. The accusation of ‘Lügenpresse’ persists not because journalists consistently lie, but because the communicative conditions of contemporary media reward moral polarisation over credibility. Once distrust becomes grammatically encoded in public language, it no longer requires factual verification. It reproduces itself through repetition, alignment and outrage, becoming an infrastructure of dissent rather than a critique of error.

Linguistic division and ideological nations

Building on 'Manufacture of Dissent' (2024), this section analyses how the language of Russophilia and Russophobia functions as a grammar of manufactured anger within Bulgaria's polarised media environment, transforming geopolitical orientation into a moralised and linguistically enforced division. What appears on the surface as a dispute over foreign policy alignment is, in practice, a struggle over symbolic loyalty, where words themselves become markers of belonging, suspicion, and exclusion. The renewed confrontation between the United States and Russia has turned Bulgarian public discourse into a permanent interdiscursive conflict zone. Media outlets, journalists, and commentators increasingly adopt explicit positions along a virtual geopolitical fault line, reproducing competing narratives that frame Russia either as cultural protector or existential threat. This division is not merely ideological but linguistic. Certain expressions, metaphors, and evaluative cues operate as shorthand for political allegiance, allowing audiences to categorise texts and speakers as 'pro-Russian' or 'anti-democratic' before any substantive argument is evaluated. Language thus precedes reasoning and replaces dialogue with automatic classification. Sociological surveys from the mid-2010s reveal how deeply this linguistic polarisation resonates with public sentiment. Bulgaria stands out within the European Union and NATO for its ambivalent attitudes toward Western security structures and persistent cultural sympathy toward Russia. These conflicting orientations coexist within society but are rendered mutually hostile through media framing. Traditional historical affinities are repeatedly staged as political deviance, while pro-Western alignment is presented as the sole legitimate democratic position. The result is not deliberation but moral escalation, sustained by constant media repetition. This dynamic reached a new stage with the publication of the 2017 study 'Anti-democratic Propaganda in Bulgaria', which attempted to identify pro-Russian influence through systematic keyword analysis of media texts. Although methodologically innovative, the study exemplifies how research itself can become an instrument of manufactured dissent. By defining specific phrases, critiques, and thematic concerns as indicators of anti-democratic ideology, the analysis transformed political disagreement into implicit moral accusation. Linguistic usage alone was treated as evidence of illegitimacy, collapsing the distinction between criticism and subversion. The study's openly Euro-Atlantic normative position was presented as a defence of liberal democracy, yet its operational logic reinforced a binary worldview structured around 'own' and 'foreign' positions. Media space was divided into democratic and anti-democratic camps, with little room for ambiguity or dissent within democracy itself. This approach reflects what Jürgen Habermas described as systematically distorted communication: participants believe they are engaging in rational critique, while in fact reproducing ideological automatisms that foreclose understanding. The paradox becomes clearer when prominent critical thinkers are absorbed into this classificatory logic. Translated texts by figures such as Habermas himself were algorithmically flagged as part of anti-democratic propaganda because they criticised European elites, technocratic governance, or service journalism. The absurdity of labelling such critique as inherently anti-democratic reveals the danger of reducing political language to moral codes enforced by computational filters. When criticism of power is linguistically criminalised, democracy is defended by suspending its own principles. This mechanism produces what may be described as ideological nations: symbolic communities held together by shared vocabularies of outrage and suspicion rather than shared political projects. Within these communities, language justifies increasingly extreme interpretations and moral judgements, while opponents are dismissed as manipulated, paid, or deluded. As Alan Gross has argued, systematically distorted communication does not merely mislead audiences but reshapes the moral universe of

those who participate in it, normalising exclusion and hostility as ethical necessity. In the Bulgarian online media environment, this linguistic polarisation is intensified by commercial incentives. Conflict-driven content generates attention, engagement, and revenue. Moral anger becomes a resource, and ideological certainty becomes marketable identity. Public opinion leaders across opposing camps remain convinced of their moral superiority, while attributing bad faith to all others. This mutual delegitimating sustains a cycle in which dissent is not resolved but continuously reproduced. The language of Russophilia and Russophobia therefore operates less as a reflection of geopolitical reality than as an infrastructure of division. By encoding loyalty and betrayal into everyday speech, it fragments the public sphere into antagonistic blocs incapable of collective deliberation. The most damaging consequence is not disagreement itself but the erosion of national consent. When communication is organised around accusation rather than understanding, democratic life enters a state of post-democratic inertia, where conflict is permanent and meaning is exhausted by repetition.

Hostility index and industrialisation of hate

Grounded[49] in 'Dissent and the theory of mass communication' (2023), this segment argues that the ‘Media Hostility Index’ is not a neutral diagnostic tool but a linguistic technology for organising political anger, classifying publics, and scaling conflict communication in the online Cold War between the United States and Russia. Under the appearance of measurement, such indices perform a deeper communicative function: they translate geopolitical rivalry into an everyday grammar of suspicion, where audiences are trained to treat dissent as proof of external manipulation and to interpret media difference as hostile intent. The question underneath these instruments is older than the digital era: is the impulse to dominate stronger than the impulse to deliberate as equals? Even when dialogue exists, it easily collapses into dispute, and language becomes less a medium of consent than a weapon for asserting position. In this sense, communication carries an inherited residue of aggression. Modern media, especially in networked environments, do not simply report this aggression; they circulate it, refine it, and globalise it through repeated frames, moral cues, and identity markers. Conrad Lorenz’s 1963 study of aggression is useful here not because it supplies a timeless biological explanation for politics, but because it clarifies the ritual dimension of hostility. Lorenz described aggression as an instinct that can be channelled through symbolic conflict, producing ritualised confrontations that preserve cohesion without immediate physical collision. This logic is recognisable in contemporary ideological camps that threaten, accuse, and denounce constantly, while rarely resolving anything. In mass society, the ritual is carried by language. Media discourse turns the clash itself into a durable social form, a continuing performance that maintains group identity through recurring accusations. Hostility metrics upgrade this ritual with algorithmic authority. By quantifying negativity, categorising outlets, and ranking countries, they create a simplified moral map of the world: friends, enemies, and compromised intermediaries. Such tools promise clarity, yet their practical effect is to normalise the enemy-image as permanent background. A public trained to read communication through indices of hostility becomes easier to mobilise through fear and resentment. Dissent is no longer a democratic signal of disagreement; it becomes evidence of contamination. The Bulgarian case illustrates how this works through institutionalised keyword classification. Sensika’s

[49] Ayolov, P. (2023). Dissent and the theory of mass communication. [online] pp.38–74. doi:https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003380207-3.

algorithmic detection of ‘anti-democratic’ and ‘pro-Russian’ discourse translated ideological contest into searchable linguistic tokens. Certain phrases were treated as indicators of deviance rather than elements of permissible political criticism. The machinery did not merely describe polarisation; it helped to organise it by providing a technique for labelling authors and outlets as hostile. Once that label exists, it disciplines audiences into suspicion: reading becomes surveillance, and political disagreement becomes a diagnostic symptom. On the opposing side of the same conflict logic stands the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies and its ‘World Mass Media Hostility Index’, which classifies foreign media environments by measuring negative versus positive coverage of Russia. The technique appears symmetrical to Western counter-disinformation projects: collect large datasets, sort tone, and produce an index. Yet the point of symmetry is precisely the problem. Two rival blocs use similar methods to validate opposing narratives of victimhood and threat. Each side demonstrates that it is under hostile informational attack, and each side justifies its own communication strategy as defensive necessity. This is why the index must be read as a political speech act, not a research finding. It performs an accusation in quantified form. Instead of asking whether particular claims are true, it asks whether entire media systems are hostile. The shift is decisive. Truth becomes secondary to alignment, and alignment becomes measurable. The index then functions as a tool for manufacturing moral anger: the public is supplied with a number that stands in for indignation, and indignation is supplied with the legitimacy of scientific style. The European public sphere is the primary casualty of this logic. During the twentieth century, Cold War propaganda partitioned national media landscapes along physical borders. In the networked present, rival propaganda infrastructures operate simultaneously inside every European country. The result is internal dissent that appears organic but is frequently intensified by external conflict scripting. Hostility indices contribute to this outcome by framing the public sphere as a battlespace, training institutions to see communication as threat, and encouraging audiences to interpret disagreement as betrayal. The deeper irony is that these tools claim to reduce disinformation while they widen the conditions for its success. By insisting that hostility is measurable and omnipresent, they teach publics to expect manipulation everywhere. Such expectation dissolves communicative trust, and where trust collapses, outrage becomes the easiest substitute for judgement. The ‘Media Hostility Index’ therefore represents a new stage in the manufacture of dissent: not merely circulating anger, but bureaucratising it, numbering it, and distributing it as a ready-made moral orientation.

Cult language of anger

James Lindsay analyses[50] the linguistic mechanics of contemporary ideological movements in his discussion of double-meaning language and initiation practices, arguing that moral anger is not a by-product but a primary tool through which such movements consolidate identity and cohesion within and against opposing groups. The central claim is that language is used not merely to persuade but to initiate, irritate, and polarise, producing a shared emotional economy in which outrage becomes the glue that binds insiders together while simultaneously defining outsiders. At the core of this process lies the deliberate use of words with split meanings. Terms such as ‘diversity’, ‘inclusion’, ‘belonging’, or ‘equity’ operate simultaneously on two levels. On the surface, their exoteric meaning appears familiar, benign, and morally attractive. These words evoke widely shared values and trigger immediate moral assent. Beneath this surface,

[50] Lindsay, J.A. (2022). The Marxification of Education.

however, an esoteric meaning circulates among those already initiated into the ideological framework. This hidden meaning redefines the term according to a specific doctrinal logic, often linked to power, hierarchy, and moral purification. The effectiveness of this linguistic strategy depends precisely on the gap between what outsiders hear and what insiders understand. This double coding is not accidental. It functions as a classic mechanism of initiation. New participants are first drawn in through emotionally charged but broadly acceptable language. Agreement at this stage requires little effort, only a willingness to affirm values that appear self-evidently good. As engagement deepens, irritation follows. Ambiguities surface, taboos are broken, and previously neutral assumptions are challenged or inverted. At this point, moral anger is deliberately provoked. Those who resist are framed as morally suspect, while those who accept the redefinition experience a sense of ethical awakening. Anger thus becomes a rite of passage, marking the transition from passive sympathy to active belonging. Crucially, this anger does not operate in only one direction. It produces unity on both sides of the divide. Among insiders, shared outrage functions as a bonding mechanism. It signals moral seriousness, loyalty, and critical consciousness. To be angry in the correct way, at the correct targets, and using the correct vocabulary becomes proof of initiation. Among outsiders, irritation and confusion generate defensive anger in response. This reciprocal escalation strengthens group boundaries. Each side becomes more coherent by reacting to the other, locked into a symmetrical structure of moral hostility. Breaking taboos plays a central role in this dynamic. Provocative language, symbolic transgressions, and norm violations are deployed not simply to shock but to test allegiance. Offence becomes a sorting mechanism. Those who are angered in the 'wrong' way reveal themselves as uninitiated, while those who reinterpret or excuse the provocation demonstrate their readiness to adopt the esoteric frame. Moral anger here is not a spontaneous reaction but a managed resource, carefully distributed and redirected to maintain ideological momentum. This tactic resembles older forms of initiate societies, particularly gnostic traditions, where secret knowledge distinguished the enlightened from the uninitiated. Language served as both veil and signal. Mastery of coded terms indicated belonging, while misunderstanding exposed ignorance. In contemporary ideological contexts, the same structure persists, but with an added emotional dimension. Anger accelerates initiation by bypassing slow rational deliberation. It produces urgency, moral clarity, and a sense of collective struggle. Importantly, the attraction of this system lies not only in its promise of justice but in its emotional rewards. Moral anger provides empowerment, purpose, and a feeling of moral elevation. It offers participants a way to experience meaning through opposition. Yet this same mechanism discourages clarification. Requests for precise definitions threaten the emotional charge that sustains the group. Vagueness is therefore protected, allowing language to oscillate between its exoteric and esoteric meanings as circumstances require. Understanding the cult language of anger reveals that ideological conflict today is often less about competing arguments than about competing initiation rituals. Moral anger is cultivated, circulated, and reinforced through linguistic ambiguity, taboo violation, and emotional escalation. In this sense, outrage does not merely express division; it manufactures solidarity by turning irritation itself into a shared moral currency.

The moral language of hate

In 'The (moral) language of hate', Brendan Kennedy, Preni Golazizian, Jackson Trager, Mohammad Atari, Joe Hoover, Aida Mostafazadeh Davani and Morteza Dehghani demonstrate

that hateful language[51] is rarely 'just hate', because it is typically braided with moral vocabulary that frames exclusion, dehumanisation, and even violence as righteous necessity. The paper starts from a blunt historical fact: words have repeatedly served as infrastructure for intimidation and genocide, not only by insulting an outgroup but by narrating that outgroup as a moral threat that must be contained, cleansed, or removed. From this angle, hate speech is not merely emotional leakage or poor manners; it is organised persuasion that recruits listeners by offering them a moral storyline in which cruelty can be re-described as duty. The central proposal is simple but disruptive: morality and hate are concomitant in language. Moral language supplies reasons, justifications, and sacred-sounding imperatives that convert prejudice into 'principle'. This helps explain why hate can feel internally coherent to perpetrators and why moralised hate spreads so effectively in groups: it promises not only emotional release but also moral status. The work then formalises this claim through three studies across radically different contexts, with each context providing a different window into how moral framing amplifies hateful ends. The first study investigates propaganda designed to inspire mass violence, using historical texts associated with Nazi leadership between 1933 and 1945. Here, hate appears with a distinctive moral colouring: the outgroup is described through a moral contrast of purity and contamination, as if the political goal were hygiene rather than domination. That purity framing is more than metaphor. It transforms disgust into a civic virtue and turns cruelty into 'cleansing', a linguistic move that can make extreme actions appear like restoration of an objective order rather than a choice to harm. In this setting, hate is built as a moral emergency. The second study shifts from propaganda narratives to the micro-level of slurs across large corpora in many languages, using computational methods to test implicit associations. The moral signal changes: loyalty language becomes prominent. This matters because slurs are not only insults; they are boundary-markers. Loyalty framing codes the outgroup as betrayers, infiltrators, or enemies of 'real people', and it pressures bystanders to prove belonging through shared contempt. When hatred is expressed as loyalty, dissent looks like treason. The third study examines hate speech on social media, drawing on a large dataset from the far-right platform Gab. The pattern seen in propaganda reappears: purity language again clusters with hate, suggesting that online hate often spreads by rehearsing contamination stories and moral panic rather than by arguing policy details. This is especially relevant to a chapter on moral anger because purity talk easily triggers indignation: it implies that something sacred has been defiled and that neutral tolerance is complicity. In such environments, anger becomes a badge of moral membership. Across these contexts the paper also clarifies why 'initiatic' political subcultures, including those that behave like closed interpretive communities, so often rely on language games. Double meanings, euphemisms, and redefinitions let a movement speak in a respectable register to outsiders while signalling a harder programme to insiders. The point is not simply deception; it is recruitment through emotional engineering. By breaking taboos or deliberately using morally charged terms that invite predictable outrage, a group can 'put people on' in McLuhan's sense: irritation becomes a technique. Moral anger then performs two functions at once. It consolidates insiders by giving them a shared sense of virtue under attack, and it consolidates opponents by giving them a shared sense of disgust at the provocation. In network terms, this is a unity-producing tactic on both sides, because the same trigger generates solidarity through opposite moral narratives. The practical implication is that hate-speech governance cannot be reduced to surface detection alone. If hateful language is routinely moralised, then mitigation requires attention to moral

[51] Kennedy, B., Golazizian, P., Trager, J., Atari, M., Hoover, J., Davani, A.M. and Dehghani, M. (2023) 'The (moral) language of hate', PNAS Nexus, 2(7), pgad210. https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad210

frames, especially purity and loyalty, and to the ways moral anger is cultivated as a social glue. The deeper warning is that moral language can be weaponised to make harm feel like conscience, and once hatred wears the mask of righteousness it becomes harder to argue with, because it is no longer presented as preference but as obligation.

The harm grammar of moral outrage

Drawing on Kurt Gray's book[52] 'Outraged: Why We Fight About Morality and Politics and How to Find Common Ground' (2023), this section situates moral outrage within the broader architecture of manufactured anger and the planned obsolescence of communication, reframing political conflict as a struggle over perceived harm rather than over facts, interests, or reasoned disagreement. Gray's central claim is that contemporary moral and political conflict is organised around competing perceptions of victimhood. Outrage emerges not because people lack moral standards, but because they apply the same moral logic to radically different objects of perceived harm. At the psychological core of moral conflict lies a simple mechanism: people become outraged when they believe someone innocent is being harmed, ignored, or denied recognition as a victim. Moral judgement is therefore not primarily rule-based or ideological, but harm-based. Acts are condemned in proportion to how strongly they are perceived to cause suffering. This framework explains why moral disputes feel absolute and non-negotiable. When disagreement is framed as a conflict between victims and perpetrators, compromise becomes morally suspect and dialogue appears as betrayal. Gray illustrates this mechanism through a formative episode of road rage, where two individuals narrowly avoid a collision and subsequently perceive each other as moral aggressors. Each party experiences fear and vulnerability, and each interprets the other as the source of harm. Despite radically asymmetrical behaviour, both experience righteous indignation. This micro-level encounter mirrors macro-political conflict: moral certainty arises not from objective harm, but from subjective perception of threat. Each side experiences itself as the true victim, regardless of external assessment. This insight is crucial for understanding contemporary outrage politics. In highly mediated environments, moral perception is detached from direct experience and increasingly shaped by narrative, imagery, and repetition. Media systems amplify selective representations of suffering, producing a competitive economy of victimhood. Groups are mobilised not through shared projects but through shared perceptions of harm inflicted by others. Moral outrage becomes a resource: it binds in-groups, legitimises hostility, and justifies exclusion. Within this framework, outrage is not a deviation from moral reasoning but its intensification under conditions of communicative saturation. Gray argues that all moral minds operate according to the same basic structure. Conservatives and progressives do not possess different moral faculties; they prioritise different victims. One side foregrounds harm to vulnerable minorities, children, or the environment, while the other emphasises harm to traditions, security, or symbolic order. Both positions are sincere. Both are rooted in perceived threat. Yet because each side recognises only its own victims as legitimate, the other is moralised as cruel, ignorant, or evil. This moral typecasting produces a zero-sum communicative environment. Once a group is designated as villainous, its suffering becomes morally invisible. Dialogue collapses because acknowledging the other's harm threatens one's own moral standing. Outrage therefore displaces communication with accusation. Language

[52] Gray, K. (2023). Outraged: Why We Fight About Morality and Politics and How to Find Common Ground. London: Penguin Random House.

shifts from explanation to denunciation, from persuasion to exposure. Moral speech ceases to be oriented toward understanding and becomes a tool for boundary maintenance. The relevance for the grammar of outrage is clear. Harm perception operates as a master key that unlocks moral condemnation, but it is also highly malleable. Perceptions of harm are shaped by culture, memory, identity, and media framing. In digital environments, where attention is monetised and emotional intensity rewarded, harm narratives proliferate and escalate. The threshold for what counts as harmful expands, while the capacity to adjudicate competing claims diminishes. This produces what might be called moral inflation: ever-smaller slights are experienced as existential threats, and outrage becomes permanent rather than episodic. Gray's analysis implicitly aligns with the logic of manufactured dissent. When political communication is organised around competing harm narratives, conflict becomes self-sustaining. Each side experiences outrage as morally necessary, while the system benefits from perpetual antagonism. Trust erodes not because morality disappears, but because it is overactivated. Shared moral concern, once a basis for solidarity, becomes a weapon for division. Importantly, Gray resists the conclusion that outrage is simply irrational or malicious. Moral outrage is rooted in ancient evolutionary mechanisms designed to detect danger and protect the vulnerable. However, in modern societies where physical threats are less immediate, these mechanisms are redirected toward symbolic and political domains. Social media accelerates this process by constantly presenting ambiguous threats without resolution. Fear and indignation are triggered without closure, reinforcing a cycle of moral arousal without repair. The consequence is communicative inversion. Instead of fostering common ground, moral language entrenches division. Instead of coordinating action, it produces mutual suspicion. In this sense, outrage exemplifies the end point of the planned obsolescence of communication. Speech remains abundant, but understanding becomes scarce. Moral concern persists, but trust collapses. The system no longer manufactures consent; it manufactures righteous anger, miscommunication, and ultimately discommunication, ensuring that conflict continues without convergence.

Prey psychology and outrage markets

Kurt Gray argues in 'Outraged' (2023) that moral conflict is better explained by humans' inherited vigilance as prey than by the flattering myth of humans as natural predators. Gray advances a counterintuitive but consequential claim: human moral psychology is shaped less by an inherited identity as predators than by a deep evolutionary history as prey. This shift in perspective fundamentally alters how moral conflict, fear, and outrage should be understood in contemporary political communication. Modern societies tend to imagine humans as dominant actors, confident masters of their environment, projecting this assumption onto moral opponents who are perceived as aggressive, calculating, and malicious. In political discourse, opponents are often framed as predators who threaten values, children, traditions, or the nation itself. Such imagery supports a destruction narrative of conflict, where moral disagreement is interpreted as intentional harm inflicted by powerful enemies. Gray challenges this assumption by arguing that for the vast majority of human evolution, hominids were vulnerable, weak, and frequently hunted by larger predators. Fear, vigilance, and threat detection, rather than dominance, shaped the human mind. Anthropological and paleoanthropological evidence undermines the long-standing 'killer ape' myth popularised in the twentieth century. Early interpretations of fossil evidence, such as the Taung child, portrayed ancestral humans as violent hunters. Later reanalysis demonstrated that many such remains were more plausibly the result of predation by large birds or carnivores. Additional fossil discoveries, comparative primate studies, and

ecological reconstructions indicate that early hominids lacked the physical attributes of apex predators. Speed, strength, claws, fangs, and night vision belonged to the animals hunting them, not to humans themselves. The belief that upright posture, throwing ability, and endurance running mark humans as natural hunters also weakens under scrutiny. Bipedalism emerged millions of years before widespread hunting technologies and is more plausibly explained as an adaptation for scanning environments for danger, transporting food and infants, and migrating across landscapes. Throwing accuracy and endurance running, while impressive in modern contexts, required technological and social infrastructures absent for most of human evolution. For long stretches of prehistory, such abilities would have offered limited protection and substantial risk. This evolutionary vulnerability left a durable psychological imprint. A prey species survives by anticipating danger, over-detecting threats, and reacting quickly to ambiguous signals. Such vigilance is adaptive in predator-rich environments but becomes destabilising in modern symbolic environments saturated with information. Political communication exploits this legacy by presenting opponents as existential threats. Moral outrage becomes a defensive reaction, not an expression of dominance, but an attempt to protect against perceived harm. Within the grammar of outrage, this prey-based psychology explains why moral conflicts escalate so rapidly and resist resolution. Fear precedes reasoning. Once a group perceives itself as threatened, communication shifts from explanation to alarm, from persuasion to mobilisation. Outrage functions as a signal of danger, binding groups together against an imagined predator. The resulting language is urgent, moralised, and absolutist, leaving little space for trust or compromise. This perspective also clarifies why outrage persists even in conditions of relative safety. The absence of physical predators does not deactivate threat-detection systems. Instead, danger is relocated to abstract domains: speech, symbols, policies, identities. Social media accelerates this displacement by continuously presenting narratives of harm without temporal closure. Fear is triggered repeatedly without resolution, producing chronic moral arousal. Understanding humans as prey rather than predators reframes political hostility. Moral attacks often arise not from a desire to dominate but from perceived vulnerability. Accusations of corruption, grooming, betrayal, or existential threat reflect fear-driven cognition rather than strategic cruelty. This does not excuse harm, but it explains its emotional force and communicative structure. Within the broader argument of this chapter, the prey model helps explain how outrage becomes systemic. Communication no longer aims at mutual understanding but at collective self-defence. Language is repurposed as a warning system rather than a bridge. Over time, this leads to miscommunication, as messages are interpreted through threat rather than meaning, and ultimately to discommunication, where dialogue itself is experienced as dangerous. The end result of this process is communicative inversion. Instead of creating unity, trust, or consent, the grammar of outrage manufactures fear, division, and alienation. Moral language remains intense and abundant, but shared understanding collapses. The planned obsolescence of communication does not eliminate morality; it weaponises it, ensuring permanent mobilisation without reconciliation.

Outrage as privatised justice

Kurt Gray argues that the modern explosion of moral conflict is rooted in a much older problem: survival improved when humans clustered in groups, yet group life also created new dangers that required a moral technology capable of restraining people from harming one another. A physically unimpressive species cannot rely on fangs or speed, so safety in numbers becomes the first solution. The logic is familiar in prey ecology: risk is diluted when many bodies share

the same space, predators are confused by collective movement, and vigilance improves when more eyes and ears monitor the environment. In primate troops this vigilance becomes communicative: alarm calls do not merely express fear but specify the kind of threat and the appropriate response. In human groups, language amplifies that advantage by allowing detailed warnings, coordination, and the accumulation of inherited survival knowledge. Group life therefore becomes an infrastructure for protection, extending beyond predator avoidance into food sharing, childcare, technology transfer, and the division of labour that later makes complex society possible. Yet the same proximity that produces safety also produces a second-order threat: other humans. The social transition creates internal vulnerabilities that are morally consequential. Free riders exploit collective effort while contributing little. Ambitious leaders accumulate resources, convert resources into authority, and use authority to immunise themselves from accountability. Violence within the group, even at rates far lower than folklore imagines, remains an ever-present risk because it dissolves trust, and trust is the condition of cooperation. In a small community, distrust is not merely an emotional discomfort but an existential hazard: it undermines coordination, encourages retaliatory spirals, and can fracture the very coalition that keeps people safe. In this sense morality emerges less as philosophical refinement than as a stabilising device for group survival, a shared repertoire of 'must not' and 'must' that narrows acceptable behaviour so that collective life remains possible. Moral norms vary, but their function converges. Whether anchored in law, custom, or sacred instruction, the baseline prohibition concerns the intentional harming of vulnerable members. Other norms cluster around property, loyalty, and authority because violations in these domains destabilise cooperation. Even practices that look paradoxical from a modern standpoint can be understood as attempts to manage competing harms under different material conditions. The key point for this chapter is that morality is not simply a private conscience; it is a social system that motivates enforcement. When enforcement is required, the group needs an energy source strong enough to overcome the personal risk of intervening against a wrongdoer. That energy source is moral outrage. Outrage is the felt mechanism that transforms moral judgement into action. It is bodily, urgent, and cognitively narrowing: heart rate rises, attention tunnels, and the calculus of personal risk is temporarily suspended in favour of punishment. In experimental public-goods settings the pattern is clear. Cooperative arrangements collapse when free riding spreads, because rational actors begin to imitate selfishness once they believe others are exploiting the common pool. When people are allowed to punish at a cost to themselves, cooperation becomes more stable across repeated rounds, precisely because the willingness to incur cost signals that exploitation will not be tolerated. From a narrow economic perspective, punishment looks irrational in the moment; from a group-survival perspective, it is an insurance premium paid to prevent the larger harm of social breakdown. Outrage supplies the motivational force to pay that premium. This older logic helps explain why outrage is so easily recruited by contemporary media systems. Digital platforms convert the moral impulse to punish into scalable behaviour: reporting, dogpiling, quote-posting, doxx-adjacent insinuation, reputational sabotage, and algorithmic amplification of indignation. The crucial shift is that punishment becomes symbolic and networked, while the targets become abstracted and infinitely substitutable. What once functioned as a costly commitment to defend a small community can be repurposed into a low-cost performance of moral alignment for a mass audience. Outrage is no longer only a response to clear interpersonal harm; it becomes an attention technology that thrives on ambiguity, contested victimhood, and perpetual moral accusation. In such conditions, outrage does not simply enforce norms; it manufactures the emotional climate in which enforcement becomes a habit and suspicion becomes a civic style. The consequence is a reversal of the moral function

that originally made outrage adaptive. Instead of protecting cooperation, networked outrage can corrode it by turning every disagreement into a threat, every opponent into a wrongdoer, and every conversation into a tribunal. Miscommunication emerges when speech is interpreted primarily as danger-signalling rather than meaning-making, and discommunication follows when the system increasingly rewards disruption over understanding. The outcome is not unity, trust, or consent, but a reproducible political economy of dissent in which anger circulates as both content and currency.

3.3. The Manufacture of Dissent

Digital capitalism and cecorative democracy

This part examines how digital capitalism produces a form of decorative democracy in which democratic institutions persist symbolically while their substantive communicative and deliberative functions are hollowed out. What emerges is not the collapse of democracy, but its transformation into a managed spectacle that preserves procedural appearance while surrendering real power to market-driven communication systems. Digital capitalism reorganises political communication according to economic incentives rather than civic norms. In online media ecosystems, conflict, outrage, and polarisation generate attention, and attention generates revenue. Under these conditions, dissent is no longer a corrective force aimed at improving governance or expanding participation. It becomes a commodity optimised for circulation. Media organisations and platforms are rewarded not for resolving disagreements but for sustaining them. The more persistent and emotionally charged the conflict, the more profitable the informational flow. As a result, political communication shifts away from persuasion and consensus-building toward continuous agitation. This transformation aligns with Dan Schiller's analysis of digital capitalism[53] as an extension of market logic into all domains of social life. Digital networks do not merely transmit information; they restructure communication itself to conform to advertising-based revenue models. Journalism, education, political debate, and even personal expression become subordinated to metrics of engagement. Accuracy, proportionality, and public interest lose institutional priority unless they contribute to traffic. The marketisation of communication thus inverts traditional democratic values. Instead of communication serving democracy, democracy becomes content within a commercial media environment. Oliver Boyd-Barrett's work on conflict propaganda[54] demonstrates how this logic intensifies during geopolitical crises. Media coverage of international conflicts increasingly resembles competitive storytelling rather than contextual analysis. Complex realities are simplified into moral binaries that are easily consumed and shared. This process does not require centralised manipulation. It emerges organically from economic incentives that favour sensationalism, emotional framing, and repetition. Disinformation and misinformation are not anomalies within digital capitalism; they are efficient formats within an attention economy that rewards speed and impact over verification. The political consequences of this system are profound. Liberal democracy depends on a minimum level of shared reality and trust in communicative institutions. Digital capitalism erodes both. The constant circulation of competing narratives destabilises political authority without replacing it with a viable alternative. Transparency does not lead to accountability but

[53] Schiller, D. (1999). Digital capitalism: Networking the global market system. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
[54] Boyd-Barrett, O. (2016). Western mainstream media and the Ukraine crisis: A study in conflict propaganda. London: Routledge.

to suspicion. The exposure of political processes, combined with algorithmic amplification of scandal and outrage, weakens institutional legitimacy. Citizens encounter politics primarily as spectacle, reinforcing cynicism rather than engagement. In response, states increasingly drift toward what can be described as decorative or managed democracy. Elections, parliaments, and legal frameworks remain intact, but their capacity to structure public opinion diminishes. Power migrates toward unelected actors who control communication infrastructures. Digital platforms assume quasi-political roles by moderating speech, filtering information, and shaping visibility. Governments outsource surveillance, content regulation, and behavioural management to private corporations whose primary obligation is profit rather than democratic accountability. This outsourcing creates a structural paradox. Democracies require free and pluralistic communication, yet the same freedoms enable corporate monopolisation of attention and data. Efforts to counter disinformation through regulation or content moderation often reinforce platform dominance by legitimising their role as arbiters of truth. The state appears active while relinquishing substantive control. Democracy persists as form, while its communicative foundation is reorganised according to market imperatives. The result is decorative democracy: a political order in which participation is simulated through visibility, engagement, and performative dissent, while real decision-making remains insulated from public influence. Citizens are encouraged to express opinions continuously, yet these expressions are absorbed into data streams that serve commercial optimisation rather than collective deliberation. Political anger circulates freely, but it rarely translates into structural change. Dissent becomes noise rather than pressure. This condition does not represent a deviation from digital capitalism but its logical outcome. A system built on monetising attention cannot sustain communicative equality or durable consent. Instead, it thrives on fragmentation, emotional volatility, and perpetual disagreement. Democratic legitimacy is maintained rhetorically while being eroded materially. Institutions remain recognisable, yet increasingly ineffective at generating trust. Without confronting the economic foundations of digital communication, attempts to repair democracy will remain superficial. Regulatory interventions that ignore advertising models and data extraction merely adjust the surface of the system. Restoring democratic substance requires reasserting communication as a public purpose rather than a commercial resource. Otherwise, decorative democracy will continue to flourish as a stable façade, while dissent, anger, and mistrust are endlessly manufactured beneath it.

Dissent, and the erosion of social capital

Drawing on the contrast outlined[55] by Noam Chomsky between Aristotle's concern with material inequality and James Madison's strategy of limiting democracy rather than inequality, this section examines how digital capitalism reproduces a Madisonian logic at the level of communication, transforming trust into a scarce resource and dissent into a managed commodity. What is at stake is not simply a crisis of public confidence but a deeper erosion of social capital, understood as the shared norms and informal bonds that allow democratic societies to function without constant coercion or manipulation. In Aristotle's view, democracy was preferable to oligarchy precisely because it rested on a degree of material balance that prevented permanent factional conflict. Excessive inequality threatened civic stability and had to be restrained if collective self-government was to endure. Madison confronted the same

[55] Chomsky, N. and Barsamian, D. (2013). Power systems: Conversations on global democratic uprisings and the new challenges to the US empire. New York: Metropolitan Books.

structural problem in a context of expanding commerce and social stratification and reached a different conclusion. Rather than limiting inequality, he sought to limit democracy itself by concentrating power in institutions insulated from popular pressure. Chomsky's observation is that this solution did not disappear but became a structural feature of modern liberal systems. Under digital capitalism, this logic migrates from political institutions into communication infrastructures. The contemporary equivalents of Madison's Senate are digital platforms, media conglomerates, and information intermediaries that control visibility, circulation, and access. Inequality is no longer only economic but informational. Control over data, algorithms, and attention allows a small number of actors to shape public discourse while remaining formally outside democratic accountability. This configuration corrodes what Francis Fukuyama defined as social capital: the capacity of people to cooperate spontaneously on the basis of shared expectations and trust. Where social capital is strong, dissent does not threaten cohesion; it is absorbed into ongoing relationships. Where it is weak, disagreement quickly hardens into antagonism. Trust in democratic societies emerges from everyday communication that is perceived as direct, intelligible, and reciprocally oriented. It does not require unanimity of belief but presupposes a shared commitment to living together despite differences. Digital capitalism undermines this condition in two interrelated ways. First, online media expose inequalities, corruption, and elite privilege with unprecedented clarity. Secrecy becomes difficult to sustain, and naïve trust in institutions erodes. Second, the same environment rewards strategic communication, public relations, and narrative management designed to compensate for this loss of trust. Spontaneous communication is crowded out by professionally engineered messages, saturating the public sphere with persuasion rather than dialogue. Under these conditions, the traditional model of manufacturing consent loses effectiveness. When publics no longer trust official narratives, consent cannot be reliably stabilised. Elites therefore shift toward manufacturing dissent as a mode of governance. Polarisation, segmentation, and permanent conflict replace consensus-building. The logic of divide and rule is reactivated in communicative form. Publics are split into hostile camps defined by identity, ideology, or moral posture, while structural inequalities remain largely untouched. Dissent becomes a spectacle rather than a corrective, sustaining attention without producing resolution. The semantics of manufacture reveal the paradox at work. Walter Lippmann's notion of the manufacture of consent already implied that public opinion was something made rather than discovered. Edward Bernays went further, openly treating communication as a form of engineering that involved arranging and guiding perception, even at the cost of deception. While such practices were justified as necessary for democratic stability, they inevitably generated mistrust once recognised. Manufactured relations cannot replace genuine social bonds. Over time, they weaken the very legitimacy they are meant to secure. Fukuyama's analysis clarifies why this erosion is so damaging. Social capital is not produced by institutions alone but accumulated through habits, traditions, and informal cooperation extending across generations. It functions as a form of moral infrastructure, enabling societies to withstand crises without fragmenting. When communication systems rely on manipulation and external intervention, this infrastructure decays. Durkheim's concept of anomie captures the resulting condition: a breakdown of shared norms in which individuals feel disconnected from both institutions and one another. In such a context, neither horizontal trust between citizens nor vertical trust in authority can be sustained. The internet remains ambivalent in this regard. It can support the reconstruction of trust through small, cohesive communities grounded in shared experience and direct interaction. These can resemble the associative life described by Tocqueville, where voluntary cooperation counterbalances excessive individualism. At the same time, digital

infrastructures easily generate pseudo-communities formed around shallow identities, emotional mobilisation, or external manipulation. Such groups lack durable bonds and are highly susceptible to conflict scripting and exploitation. When trust collapses at scale, states respond predictably by reasserting control through regulation, censorship, and infrastructural fragmentation. Appeals to security, hybrid warfare, or disinformation justify these moves, yet their effect is to protect elites from the political consequences of transparency. Democracy persists formally while substantive participation declines. Consent is simulated through filtering and algorithmic curation, while dissent is channelled into manageable and profitable forms. The tension between trust and dissent cannot be resolved by eliminating disagreement or perfecting techniques of opinion management. Dissent is indispensable to democratic life, but when it is systematically manufactured and commodified, it becomes a symptom of systemic dysfunction rather than a source of renewal. Without rebuilding social capital and restoring conditions for spontaneous communication, democratic order drifts toward decorative forms that preserve institutional appearances while hollowing out their social foundations.

Cognitive infiltration and anger management

Building on Cass R. Sunstein's analysis in 'Why Societies Need Dissen' (2005) and his later intervention[56] with Adrian Vermeule in 'Conspiracy Theories' (2008), this section examines how contemporary liberal democracies move from tolerating dissent to administratively managing it through strategies of cognitive infiltration, thereby transforming dissent itself into an object of governance. Within the broader framework of the manufacture of dissent, Sunstein's work offers one of the most explicit theoretical justifications for state intervention in the informational environment of digital societies. Sunstein's starting point is not hostile to dissent. On the contrary, he insists that dissent is indispensable for democratic health. Drawing on classical studies of conformity and obedience, he argues that individuals are structurally inclined to silence themselves in the face of majority opinion and authority. Dissenters therefore perform an essential epistemic function: they interrupt groupthink, expose error, and expand the range of available social options. In this sense, dissent contributes directly to social capital by preventing moral stagnation and cognitive closure. A society without dissent is not harmonious but fragile, prone to catastrophic error once its dominant assumptions fail. Yet Sunstein situates this defence of dissent within a broader concern about the destabilising effects of digital communication. In Republic.com 2.0 and later works, he warns that the internet allows citizens to construct information cocoons in which they encounter only reinforcing views. Algorithmic filtering and voluntary self-selection reduce exposure to disagreement, intensifying polarisation rather than deliberation. The paradox is that unlimited communicative freedom may undermine the conditions under which democratic consent is possible. When individuals no longer share a minimal informational commons, trust in institutions and in one another erodes. To address this problem, Sunstein advances the idea of libertarian paternalism, developed with Richard Thaler. The premise is that human decision-making is shaped by cognitive biases and bounded rationality, leading individuals to make choices that are inconsistent with their own long-term interests. Rather than coercing behaviour, institutions may design choice architectures that gently steer individuals toward better outcomes while formally preserving freedom. Applied to communication, this approach legitimises subtle interventions in information environments to promote social welfare, stability, and democratic

[56] Sunstein, C. R. and Vermeule, A. (2008). 'Conspiracy Theories'. Harvard Public Law Working Paper.

resilience. The most controversial extension of this logic appears in Sunstein and Vermeule's proposal for cognitive infiltration. Confronted with the spread of conspiracy theories that portray the state as systematically deceptive and malevolent, they argue that such narratives pose a genuine threat to democratic legitimacy. When large groups reject official accounts wholesale, the symbolic authority of law and institutions collapses. In response, Sunstein and Vermeule propose that governments and allied actors should actively enter conspiratorial communities, both online and offline, to introduce doubt, alternative interpretations, and internal disagreement. The goal is not censorship but epistemic disruption: weakening what they describe as crippled epistemologies from within. Cognitive infiltration thus represents a shift from suppressing dissent to multiplying and fragmenting it. Rather than eliminating oppositional narratives, the state seeks to dilute them by fostering internal disagreement and competing interpretations. In effect, dissent is neutralised by excess. Genuine dissidents find their voices submerged in a sea of manufactured controversies, counter-claims, and diversionary debates. Dissent becomes omnipresent yet politically ineffective. This model fits seamlessly into the broader logic of the manufacture of dissent under digital capitalism. Online environments already reward conflict, novelty, and emotional intensity. Cognitive infiltration exploits these dynamics by adding strategically guided noise to an already saturated information space. The result is a form of managed pluralism in which opposition exists everywhere but coherence emerges nowhere. Public debate appears vibrant, yet structural critique rarely consolidates into collective action. Critics have identified troubling historical resonances in this approach. Journalists such as Glenn Greenwald and scholars such as David Ray Griffin have compared cognitive infiltration to earlier programmes of covert surveillance and disruption, most notably COINTELPRO. These initiatives were likewise justified as necessary for national security and social order, yet they frequently targeted legitimate political movements and eroded public trust once exposed. The lesson is not merely historical. In digital environments, infiltration scales easily, operates invisibly, and blurs the boundary between persuasion and deception. The deeper problem is the effect on social capital. Trust depends on the belief that communication is not systematically manipulated and that dissent is not pre-scripted by power. When citizens suspect that both agreement and disagreement are engineered, cynicism replaces engagement. Even well-intentioned interventions risk accelerating the very mistrust they seek to prevent. A society that comes to view dissent as an administrative variable rather than a moral practice loses the capacity for genuine self-correction. Sunstein's work thus reveals a central tension in contemporary democracy. Dissent is celebrated in principle but constrained in practice. It is encouraged as long as it remains diffuse, fragmented, and manageable, and treated as dangerous when it threatens to coalesce into sustained opposition. Cognitive infiltration exemplifies this shift from democratic pluralism to technocratic containment. Within the framework of the manufacture of dissent, this strategy represents a decisive step toward discommunication. Communication no longer aims at mutual understanding or collective problem-solving, but at strategic interference in meaning-making processes. Instead of strengthening trust, such interventions risk normalising manipulation as a permanent feature of public life. In the long term, dissent managed from above cannot substitute for dissent arising from lived experience, moral conviction, and autonomous association. A democracy that relies on cognitive engineering to stabilise itself may preserve formal freedoms, but it does so at the cost of the trust and social capital on which democratic life ultimately depends.

American rage and the political economy of anger

Steven W. Webster's analysis[57] in 'American Rage: How Anger Shapes Our Politics' (2020) can be read as empirical confirmation that the grammar of outrage is not a side-effect of contemporary politics but a functional mechanism within a media environment where dissent is manufactured as a durable resource. Webster's core claim is that anger has become the dominant public emotion in twenty-first-century American politics, and that its dominance has predictable political consequences: anger tightens partisan loyalty, accelerates distrust in government, and weakens commitment to democratic norms. In other words, anger does not merely express disagreement; it reorganises collective behaviour so that the conditions for shared deliberation steadily deteriorate. Webster's argument is especially useful for a chapter concerned with the manufacture of dissent because it treats anger as both an affective state and a repeatable political technology. Anger is not only a feeling that citizens 'have'; it is a response that elites can reliably 'invoke'. The significance of this shift is structural. When anger becomes the preferred political instrument, the public sphere is transformed into an arena of mobilisation rather than a space of persuasion. Consent becomes secondary, because what matters is not whether citizens believe a policy is right, but whether they remain energised, loyal, and hostile to the opposing camp. A key contribution in Webster's work is the insistence that anger functions as a partisan bonding agent. Loyalty can be sustained even when trust in one's own leaders is low, because anger toward the out-group is a stronger adhesive than admiration for the in-group. This is the logic of negative partisanship. Political identity becomes organised less around shared goods than around shared enemies. The consequences are profound for democratic stability, because political conflict is no longer episodic and policy-driven but permanent and identity-sustaining. The system requires antagonism to reproduce itself. Webster links this dynamic to the broader media environment. Anger is not difficult to produce, but it is difficult to sustain without a steady stream of provocations. Digital media provide precisely such an infrastructure: constant content turnover, personalised distribution, and an attention economy that rewards intensity. Under these conditions, outrage ceases to be exceptional and becomes habitual. What appears as spontaneous public anger is often a patterned response to repeated rhetorical cues, narrative templates, and adversarial framing. The point is not that anger is 'fake', but that it is strategically cultivated because it works. The relationship between anger and trust is central to Webster's diagnosis. Trust in government is not simply undermined by scandals or failures; it is eroded by the very emotional regime that produces electoral mobilisation. Anger encourages suspicious interpretations, hostile attributions, and a readiness to treat institutions as captured by enemies. This intensifies a feedback loop: distrust makes anger easier to provoke, and anger makes distrust more plausible. Once this loop becomes stable, democratic legitimacy becomes increasingly decorative. Institutions remain, elections continue, and political rituals persist, yet the shared belief that opponents are legitimate competitors, rather than existential threats, weakens. Webster also argues that anger weakens democratic norms, including tolerance, respect for minority positions, and willingness to accept procedural defeats. The mechanism is not complicated. Anger narrows attention and encourages reliance on group cues rather than reflective judgement. Political reasoning becomes a form of moral alignment: people adopt positions because they signal loyalty to a camp. This is the grammar of outrage at work, converting politics into a continuous sorting process in which language functions less as argument than as identity-marking. For a theory of manufactured

[57] Webster, S. W. (2020). American Rage: How Anger Shapes Our Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

dissent, Webster's most pessimistic conclusion is also the most revealing: anger is likely difficult to reverse because it is too effective. If anger reliably increases turnout and loyalty, political actors have little incentive to abandon it. The strategic use of anger becomes rational within an electoral marketplace and even more rational within a digital attention economy. This is the point where anger ceases to be a pathology of politics and becomes a stable input to political production. The American case is not merely national. It functions as a model of how contemporary democracies can slide from deliberation to permanent mobilisation when digital communication rewards conflict. Anger unifies factions against an enemy while corroding the generalised trust required for collective governance. This is why the manufacture of dissent cannot be treated as a rhetorical style. It is an economic and institutional arrangement that makes outrage productive, turning social division into a renewable resource. The final implication is bleak but clarifying. When anger becomes the dominant public emotion, dissent ceases to be a corrective addressed to power and becomes a commodity circulated for attention. The result is miscommunication as a condition of public life: people speak past one another in mutually sealed moral communities. At its limit, this becomes discommunication, where communication's function is reversed, and instead of producing unity, trust, and consent, the system manufactures dissent, hostility, and alienation as its normal output.

The emotional engine of grievance politics

Drawing on the article[58] 'Grievance Politics: An Empirical Analysis of Anger Through the Emotional Mechanism of Ressentiment' by Tereza Capelos, Mikko Salmela, and Gabija Krisciunaite (2022), this part reframes contemporary political anger as a structured affective process that aligns closely with the grammar of outrage and the planned obsolescence of communication. What appears publicly as anger is, in many cases, not anger proper but ressentiment: a slow, sedimented emotional mechanism that transforms grievance into hostility without producing agency, resolution, or collective repair. The central contribution of this work is the distinction between anger and ressentiment, a distinction that is essential for understanding how grievance politics operates within late-modern media systems. Anger proper is a discrete, short-lived emotion with a clear object and an action tendency. It arises in response to perceived injustice or obstruction and often motivates protest, correction, or confrontation. By contrast, ressentiment is not action-oriented. It emerges when anger, envy, shame, or humiliation cannot be acted upon and is therefore repressed. Over time, these blocked emotions are transmuted into morally righteous indignation, hatred, and rage, accompanied by a durable sense of victimhood and powerlessness. This transformation is crucial for a theory of manufactured dissent. Ressentiment produces intense moral language without political efficacy. It sustains emotional arousal while discouraging concrete action. In this sense, it is ideally suited to a communication environment organised around outrage rather than deliberation. The ressentimentful subject speaks constantly, accuses relentlessly, and identifies enemies obsessively, yet remains politically inert. Communication becomes expressive rather than instrumental, a performance of grievance rather than a means of change. Capelos and colleagues conceptualise ressentiment as an emotional mechanism rather than a single emotion. It operates by converting the inputs of grievance politics, deprivation, humiliation, inefficacious anger, into antisocial outputs such as hatred and destructive indignation. This mechanism relies on a set of psychological defences, including projection, splitting, denial, and reaction formation. These defences simplify a complex social world into binary moral categories: innocent victims

[58] Capelos, T., Salmela, M. and Krisciunaite, G. (2022). 'Grievance Politics: An Empirical Analysis of Anger Through the Emotional Mechanism of Ressentiment', Politics and Governance, 10(4), pp. 384–395.

versus corrupt enemies, pure in-groups versus degenerate out-groups. Such simplification aligns perfectly with the rhetorical economy of outrage-driven media. Empirically, the authors demonstrate that expressions widely labelled as ‘anger’ overwhelmingly display the markers of ressentiment. Analysing interview material drawn from widely cited accounts of American political discontent, they find persistent patterns of victimhood, envy, powerlessness, destiny, and transvaluation. What is notably absent is efficacy. Individuals in ressentiment do not articulate plausible paths for political action, nor do they express confidence in their capacity to influence outcomes. Instead, grievance is narrated as fate. The past is idealised, the present is experienced as irredeemably corrupted, and the future is foreclosed. This has direct implications for the grammar of outrage. Ressentiment thrives on repetition and rumination. Its etymological root, re-sentire, to feel again and again, captures its temporal structure. Grievances are relived rather than resolved. In digital environments that reward repetition, amplification, and emotional intensity, ressentiment becomes self-reinforcing. The same narratives circulate endlessly, acquiring moral weight through sheer persistence. Communication no longer aims at persuasion or coordination but at the reaffirmation of wounded identity. A key finding of the study is the prevalence of anti-preferences. Ressentimentful politics is organised less around positive programmes than around negations: anti-elite, anti-immigrant, anti-feminist, anti-institutional positions. These stances provide emotional satisfaction without requiring political competence or compromise. They also fragment the public sphere into antagonistic camps that share hostility but not constructive goals. From the perspective of system stability, this fragmentation is functional. It produces noise rather than opposition, heat rather than pressure. Ressentiment also explains the paradox of high emotional mobilisation combined with political disengagement. While ressentiment generates intense affect, it discourages participation in democratic practices. Individuals remain attached to grievance while withdrawing from institutions they perceive as irreversibly hostile. This is the condition in which miscommunication becomes structural. Speech circulates, but understanding collapses. Positions harden, but coordination fails. For the broader argument of this chapter, ressentiment clarifies why the contemporary politics of anger rarely leads to transformation. The system does not need to suppress dissent when it can metabolise it. Ressentiment produces dissent that is loud, moralised, and endlessly communicative, yet strategically harmless. In this sense, it represents the emotional substrate of manufactured dissent. The final consequence is discommunication. When ressentiment dominates, communication reverses its traditional function. Instead of producing trust, unity, and negotiated consent, it generates suspicion, division, and permanent antagonism. The grammar of outrage, fed by ressentiment, does not merely reflect social fragmentation; it actively reproduces it as a stable political condition.

Kayfabe and pseudo-politics

Building on the analytical framework developed in 'Manufacture of Dissent' (2024), this part examines how second-degree cybernetics and the logic of kayfabe converge to form a dominant model of contemporary political communication, in which publics knowingly participate in staged realities that organise anger, loyalty, and dissent. In digital environments, political life increasingly unfolds as a shared performance: participants recognise the artificiality of narratives yet continue to act as if they were authentic, because this collective pretence generates emotional rewards, visibility, and power. Niklas Luhmann’s concept of second-degree cybernetics, the observation of observation, captures a crucial shift in media systems. Communication no longer describes social reality directly but reflects on its own

representations, creating a recursive loop in which reality is encountered primarily through mediated constructions. Audiences are not naïve victims of manipulation. On the contrary, they are often fully aware of framing techniques, agenda-setting, and narrative scripting. What changes is not knowledge, but consent. Individuals voluntarily accept pseudo-realities because participation offers belonging, orientation, and affective intensity. Awareness of manipulation no longer disrupts belief; it becomes part of the game. The concept of kayfabe, originating in professional wrestling, provides a powerful metaphor for this condition. Kayfabe refers to the maintenance of a scripted fiction as real through collective agreement. Wrestlers, promoters, commentators, and audiences all collaborate in sustaining the illusion that staged conflict is authentic competition. The crucial point is not deception but complicity. Everyone involved understands the fiction, yet public acknowledgment of it is prohibited. The rule is simple: never break kayfabe. This logic now extends far beyond entertainment and has become a structural principle of political communication. In politics, kayfabe operates through polarised roles, exaggerated antagonisms, and ritualised scandals. Leaders perform as heroes or villains, media organisations frame conflicts as moral dramas, and audiences align emotionally with preferred characters. The spectacle thrives not on factual accuracy but on narrative coherence and emotional charge. Conflict must be continuous, visible, and personalised. As in professional wrestling, one side must always play the antagonist, absorbing outrage and sustaining attention. Political success increasingly depends on performative intensity rather than deliberative competence. Empirical research on information diffusion confirms why this model is so effective. Studies on the spread of online content demonstrate that false or fictional narratives travel faster and reach wider audiences than factual reporting, largely because novelty and emotional stimulation drive engagement. Fiction outcompetes truth not because people cannot distinguish between them, but because fiction is better suited to the economies of attention that govern digital platforms. In this environment, visibility replaces verification, and virality becomes the primary criterion of relevance. Kayfabe politics also connects to older traditions of political illusion. Walter Lippmann's idea of the pseudo-environment, Edward Bernays' defence of propaganda as a democratic necessity, and George Orwell's concept of doublespeak all describe communication systems in which fabricated narratives stabilise power. What distinguishes the contemporary moment is voluntary participation. The audience does not merely endure illusion; it demands it. Like the greengrocer in Václav Havel's parable, individuals display slogans they know to be false, not always out of fear, but because conformity offers security and advantage. Second-degree cybernetics intensifies this dynamic by dissolving the boundary between observer and participant. Media institutions observe audiences observing media, and political actors adjust performances accordingly. Communication becomes self-referential theatre. Journalists acknowledge the spectacle while continuing to stage it. Politicians denounce media manipulation while exploiting it. Audiences mock the drama while eagerly consuming it. The result is a stable system of mutual pretence in which everyone benefits individually, while collective rationality erodes. This transformation has profound consequences for democratic life. Consent is no longer grounded in argument, evidence, or shared standards of truth, but in emotional alignment with narratives. The illusion of choice between opposing spectacles replaces substantive political alternatives. Dissent is not eliminated; it is scripted, monetised, and recycled as entertainment. Moral anger becomes a renewable resource, endlessly regenerated through performative conflict. Kayfabe politics therefore represents not the corruption of democracy from the outside, but its reconfiguration from within. When governance adopts the logic of performance, the governed are no longer persuaded; they are entertained. The danger lies not in isolated falsehoods, but in a

communication culture structured around collective self-deception. Restoring communicative integrity requires recognising that the central problem is no longer ignorance, but the widespread willingness to know and pretend otherwise.

The Planned Obsolescence of Communication

Developing the argument advanced in 'The Economic Policy of Online Media: Manufacture of Dissent' (2024), this final section of The Grammar of Outrage conceptualises the planned obsolescence of communication as a structural feature of digital capitalism, in which information is designed to decay rapidly, public attention is continuously redirected, and democratic deliberation is displaced by monetised volatility. Communication no longer aims at durable understanding or shared meaning but is organised around speed, novelty, and emotional arousal, following the same economic logic that governs consumer goods in late capitalism. The consent of the governed has historically depended on relatively stable communicative orders. From mythological narratives to national ideologies, large societies relied on shared stories that endured over time, even after belief weakened. These narratives did not need to be empirically true in a scientific sense; they needed to be socially binding. Over time, however, every ideological system loses symbolic power. What once unified communities becomes banal, ritualised, and emotionally hollow. In such conditions, political language ceases to inspire conviction and survives only as habit, administration, or coercion. The contemporary media environment represents a decisive break from even this residual stability. Digital communication accelerates ideological decay by flooding the public sphere with incessant replacement. Information is no longer meant to last long enough to sediment into collective memory. Instead, it is produced for immediate consumption and rapid disposal. News items resemble consumer products with deliberately shortened life cycles. Their value lies not in truthfulness or civic relevance but in their capacity to generate clicks, outrage, and engagement before being superseded by the next item. In this sense, communication itself becomes a form of junk production, analogous to junk food or planned-obsolete electronics. This transformation undermines the epistemic foundations of democracy. Democratic systems presuppose a minimum of shared reality within which disagreement can occur. When facts are continuously displaced by emotional narratives, and when novelty outweighs verification, the possibility of informed consent collapses. Falsehood spreads more efficiently than truth because it is better adapted to the attention economy. Emotionally charged stories create instant bonds between strangers, forming transient communities of anger or fear that dissolve as quickly as they appear. These affective publics resemble ideological nations without territory, history, or responsibility. The economic incentives driving this process are concentrated in the hands of digital oligarchies whose revenues depend on advertising and behavioural prediction. Accuracy, social cohesion, and long-term trust are externalities rather than objectives. Moral anger becomes a particularly valuable commodity because it heightens focus, reduces distraction, and increases engagement. Marketing research has demonstrated that anger sharpens goal-directed behaviour, making individuals more decisive consumers. This logic transfers seamlessly into political communication, where outrage sustains attention without requiring understanding. Angry audiences are profitable, but they are not well equipped for democratic judgement. In this environment, dissent undergoes a qualitative transformation. Traditionally, dissent functioned as a corrective mechanism, allowing citizens to challenge power in the name of shared norms. Under conditions of planned obsolescence, dissent is detached from deliberation and repurposed as spectacle. It becomes endlessly reproducible

content rather than a political act aimed at reform. Moral conflict is intensified, personalised, and commodified, while structural issues remain obscured. The result is a paradoxical situation in which societies appear permanently politicised yet are increasingly incapable of collective decision-making. Attempts to address these dynamics have re-emerged periodically in media criticism. The MacBride Report articulated an early vision of a fairer global information order, yet its proposals were marginalised in favour of market-driven models. More recent interventions, including whistle-blower testimonies from within digital corporations and documentaries exposing platform incentives, confirm that the dysfunctions of online media are not accidental. They are intrinsic to a system organised around attention extraction and rapid informational turnover. Disinformation, polarisation, and moral panic are not failures of the system but its outputs. Regulatory initiatives such as the European Union's Digital Services Act signal growing recognition of the problem, particularly the link between advertising models and the amplification of harmful content. Proposals for public-service-oriented internet infrastructures revive earlier ideals of communication as a public good rather than a commodity. Yet such measures confront formidable resistance from entrenched economic interests and cultural habits shaped by years of algorithmic conditioning. The persistence of the planned obsolescence model suggests that technical fixes alone are insufficient. The deeper challenge is theoretical and normative. Communication research itself has often adapted to commercial and political demands, prioritising metrics, persuasion, and optimisation over critique. Earlier traditions of critical media analysis warned of systematically distorted communication and the dangers of subordinating public discourse to power and profit. These warnings were frequently dismissed as ideological or outdated. Today, their relevance is difficult to deny. The erosion of communicative durability accelerates social fragmentation and weakens the capacity of democratic institutions to command legitimacy. The planned obsolescence of communication therefore marks more than a media crisis; it signals a civilisational strain. When information is engineered to expire, memory dissolves, accountability weakens, and shared purpose becomes elusive. Chaos acquires economic value, while order appears inefficient. Reversing this trajectory requires more than nostalgia for past media systems. It demands a renewed commitment to communicative integrity, understood as the capacity of societies to sustain meaningful, truthful, and enduring public discourse in the face of economic pressures that reward its opposite. The end result of the planned obsolescence of communication and the grammar of outrage is not improved public understanding but systematic miscommunication, where meaning is fragmented, accelerated, and emptied of stabilising reference points. At its extreme, this process culminates in discommunication: a condition in which communication no longer aims at mutual comprehension but at strategic disruption, emotional mobilisation, and permanent conflict. Instead of producing unity, trust, and consent, the contemporary media system reverses the normative function of communication by manufacturing dissent, anger, hatred, and division, thereby alienating individuals and groups from one another and from any shared public reality.

3.4. Rationality of anger

Rational anger as instrument

Matthew Hutson's article[59] 'The Rationality of Rage', published in The New York Times in 2015, frames anger not as the collapse of reason but as a strategic emotional signal that can, under specific conditions, produce measurable social and political effects. Within the context of this chapter, this argument requires careful repositioning. Anger here is not treated as an inner feeling awaiting expression, but as a socially conditioned and increasingly engineered response that acquires instrumental value within contemporary communication systems. Classical philosophy already recognised the ambivalence of anger. Aristotle accepted anger as morally legitimate only when it was proportionate, situationally appropriate and limited in duration, while warning that excess transformed it into a destructive force. Stoic thinkers such as Seneca and later Immanuel Kant went further, arguing that anger undermines rational agency altogether by overpowering deliberation. What distinguishes the contemporary debate from these earlier positions is not a newfound appreciation of anger's usefulness, but the transformation of anger into a managed resource within strategic interaction. Experimental research summarised by Hutson suggests that expressions of anger can influence negotiations by signalling dissatisfaction, perceived undervaluation and readiness to impose costs. In particular, anger appears effective in situations that are neither fully cooperative nor openly antagonistic. In such intermediate contexts, anger communicates that an implicit boundary has been crossed and that continued disregard will produce consequences. This logic aligns with evolutionary accounts in which anger functions as a bargaining tool, indicating that one's interests are being ignored and that compliance will become more costly than concession. However, the relevance of this research for the grammar of outrage lies not in validating anger as rational, but in revealing the narrow conditions under which anger retains instrumental coherence. These studies repeatedly emphasise that anger must be perceived as genuine to function effectively. Simulated or performative anger is quickly detected and punished through loss of trust, increased resistance or reputational damage. This introduces a structural paradox: the more sincere the anger, the less controllable it becomes. Strategic benefits depend on emotional authenticity, yet authenticity undermines the capacity to regulate intensity, duration and collateral damage. In pre-digital environments, this paradox was mitigated by proximity, reputation and long-term accountability. Anger carried costs because it unfolded within stable social relations. Excessive anger risked exclusion, retaliation or durable reputational harm. As a result, anger was constrained by embedded social feedback loops. Digital communication systems dismantle many of these constraints. Anger can now be expressed without immediate physical risk, sustained reputational consequence or reciprocal obligation. Under these conditions, anger increasingly detaches from instrumental rationality and becomes self-reinforcing. The concept of rational anger thus shifts meaning within networked environments. Anger is no longer deployed to resolve specific disputes or restore balance within relationships. Instead, it functions as a visibility amplifier, attention magnet and identity marker. Platforms reward emotionally charged content with reach, engagement and algorithmic amplification. In this environment, anger's strategic value is no longer tied to resolution or concession but to circulation, escalation and endurance. What appears rational at the micro-level of interaction becomes systemically irrational at the macro-level of collective communication. This transformation explains why contemporary anger often fails to resolve disputes and instead

[59] Hutson, M. (2015) 'The Rationality of Rage', The New York Times, 20 September. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/20/opinion/sunday/the-rationality-of-rage.html

entrenches polarisation. Neuroscientific research consistently shows that heightened emotional arousal narrows perception, reduces cognitive flexibility and impairs complex reasoning. While anger may momentarily clarify perceived injustice, sustained exposure produces cognitive rigidity and moral absolutism. Digital systems intensify this effect by continuously stimulating outrage while inhibiting reflection, delay and proportionality. The strategic literature on anger implicitly assumes bounded contexts, shared norms and finite interactions. Once anger is removed from these conditions and embedded in attention economies, its rationality collapses. Anger no longer signals undervaluation within a negotiable relationship but becomes a generalised posture of antagonism. In such contexts, anger does not function as a means toward agreement but as a mechanism of group alignment, boundary enforcement and symbolic punishment. Within the framework of planned obsolescence of communication, this shift marks a decisive inversion. Anger was historically adaptive insofar as it defended cooperation against exploitation. In its contemporary mediated form, anger increasingly undermines the very conditions of cooperation by eroding trust, fragmenting shared reality and normalising permanent conflict. What is presented as rational anger becomes structurally irrational at the level of social outcomes. The rationality of anger, therefore, cannot be assessed solely at the level of individual advantage or short-term gain. It must be evaluated in relation to the communicative environment that shapes its expression and reward. In digital systems optimised for engagement rather than resolution, anger is not a tool subordinated to reason but a resource extracted, amplified and circulated for profit and power. Under such conditions, anger ceases to serve rational ends and becomes an infrastructure of miscommunication, preparing the ground for discommunication as a permanent social state.

Anger as epistemic force

Laura Luz Sousa Oliveira e Silva's doctoral thesis[60] 'The Rationality of Anger' (University College London) reframes anger not as a primitive failure of reason but as a complex, socially situated emotion whose rationality can be instrumental, normative and epistemic at once. This intervention matters directly for the present chapter, because it destabilises the dominant assumption that anger must be either an irrational impulse or a morally suspect excess, and instead situates anger as a structured response shaped by social conditions, power relations and communicative environments. Philosophical treatments of anger have long been polarised. Stoic traditions, echoed in contemporary moral philosophy, have treated anger as intrinsically dangerous, corrosive to judgement and hostile to reason. In contrast, feminist and critical theorists have insisted on anger's political necessity, particularly under conditions of oppression, where anger functions as motivation, insight and resistance. Silva argues that these positions appear irreconcilable only because anger's rationality has been insufficiently specified. Disagreement persists not because anger is mysterious, but because different theorists implicitly rely on different standards of rationality while talking past one another. The thesis proposes that anger must be analysed across at least three dimensions. Instrumental rationality concerns whether anger helps agents achieve their aims or instead undermines them. Normative rationality concerns whether anger responds to reasons, rather than erupting blindly. Epistemic rationality concerns whether anger contributes to knowledge by revealing morally salient features of the world. Once these distinctions are made explicit, anger no longer appears as a single homogeneous phenomenon but as a heterogeneous emotional family whose rational

[60] Silva, L.L.S.O. (2020) The Rationality of Anger. PhD thesis, University College London.

status varies with context, structure and conditions of expression. Crucially, Silva rejects the traditional construal of anger as constitutively tied to retribution or revenge. That construal, inherited from both ancient philosophy and modern moral psychology, underwrites much of the scepticism toward anger's political use. If anger necessarily aims at payback, then it will reliably provoke retaliation and escalation. Against this view, Silva argues that anger is only contingently related to retribution. In many cases, anger aims instead at recognition: a demand that wrongdoing be acknowledged, understood and taken seriously. This shift is decisive for understanding anger's role in social and political life. Where recognition is possible, anger can be instrumentally rational and constructive. Where recognition is systematically denied, anger may slide toward retribution, not because this defines its nature, but because all other avenues have been exhausted. This argument has direct implications for contemporary communication systems. Anger that once operated within bounded social relations now circulates in digital environments where recognition is algorithmically distorted. The desire for recognition is redirected toward visibility, amplification and alignment rather than understanding. Under such conditions, anger retains its motivational force but loses its stabilising orientation toward resolution. What emerges is not irrational anger, but anger whose rational capacities are structurally misaligned with its environment. Silva's account also advances a robust defence of anger's epistemic role. Anger is often criticised for biasing judgement and narrowing attention. While these effects exist, the thesis argues that they have been overstated and misunderstood. Anger can function as a mode of moral perception, making salient forms of harm, injustice or disrespect that would otherwise remain obscured. In contexts of oppression, anger may operate as an 'outlaw emotion', contradicting dominant ideologies and revealing truths that prevailing norms actively suppress. In such cases, anger does not merely motivate inquiry but itself carries justificatory force for evaluative beliefs. This epistemic role depends on anger being reason-responsive rather than reason-governed. Anger responds to reasons in a sui generis way, distinct from belief or intention. It is supported by affective reasons that do not cancel each other out in the way practical or epistemic reasons do. This explains why anger can persist even in the presence of countervailing considerations without thereby becoming irrational. The persistence of anger may signal not stubbornness but the continued presence of morally salient facts that demand acknowledgment. Within the framework of this book, the significance of this account lies in how it exposes the tension between anger's rational potential and its contemporary exploitation. Anger evolved to defend cooperation, correct injustice and restore moral equilibrium. Digital communication systems, however, detach anger from recognition and resolution, rewarding its escalation while stripping it of its epistemic and normative anchoring. Anger remains rational in form, but its rationality is redirected toward system-level goals that have little to do with justice or understanding. The rationality of anger, therefore, cannot be assessed abstractly or psychologically alone. It must be evaluated in relation to the communicative infrastructures that shape how anger is expressed, circulated and rewarded. Silva's analysis shows that anger is not inherently irrational, but neither is it inherently emancipatory. Its rationality is conditional, fragile and easily distorted. In an environment that incentivises outrage without recognition, anger ceases to function as a corrective force and instead becomes a renewable resource for division, mobilisation and discommunication.

Anger beyond payback

'The Rationality of Anger' (2020) reframes anger's nature in a way that fits the central problem of this chapter: the emotion is not merely a private impulse to be suppressed, but a

communicative force whose rational possibilities can be amplified or sabotaged by the surrounding moral and media environment. Philosophers writing from the standpoint of oppression have long emphasised anger's motivational, epistemic and psychological benefits, yet comparatively little effort has been spent on pinning down anger's nature through tidy definitions. That absence is not accidental. As Lutz notes, feminist approaches to emotion have been critical and pragmatic, shifting attention from abstract taxonomies toward the social interests served by older questions and the lived costs of treating certain emotions as illegitimate. This focus turns anger into a diagnostic: Frye maps domains of oppression by tracking when women's anger receives uptake as a credible claim about the world and when it is dismissed, because denial of uptake functions as denial of agency. hooks makes a related point about black rage, showing how an inability or refusal to hear it becomes a way of refusing to recognise racial domination. Spelman sharpens the political logic: systematic denial of anger is not simply interpersonal discourtesy but a mechanism of subordination, while the existence and expression of anger can become an act of insubordination. In such accounts, anger is less a pathological eruption than a contested social signal, a marker of whose experience is permitted to count as knowledge. Even without a strong tradition of offering necessary and sufficient conditions for anger, feminist philosophers have tended to lean toward social constructionist accounts of emotion. Jaggar argues that the apparent involuntary character of emotion is routinely misread as evidence for a presocial, instinctive basis, when mature human emotions are better understood as socially constructed across multiple levels. This matters for anger's nature because it loosens the traditional claim that anger must be essentially tied to any single desire, whether revenge, punishment, or payback. Anger becomes culturally shaped in its objects, scripts, and thresholds, which immediately complicates universal stories that treat anger as the same thing everywhere and always. At the same time, feminist writers often remain close to Aristotle on a key point: anger is minimally cognitive. Anger is intentional, responsive to perceived wrongs, and subject to appropriateness conditions, otherwise it could not do the political and epistemic work assigned to it. The major departure from Aristotle is that anger's objects need not be limited to particular individuals. Feminist accounts allow anger to take social objects, institutions, and systemic states of affairs, such as sexism, as targets. That expansion is crucial for a theory of contemporary outrage, where the object of anger is frequently a structure rather than a single actor, and where anger's communicative function is directed at publics rather than at a nearby offender. Recent moral philosophy strengthens this departure from payback by highlighting a conative component different from revenge: the desire for recognition. Srinivasan suggests that anger often aims to make a perpetrator recognise the pain caused and the wrong done, rather than to make the perpetrator suffer. Cogley similarly describes anger as confrontation that demands attention to a grievance and presses for explanation or justification, turning toward change when the justification fails. This orientation places anger closer to an epistemic demand than a punitive craving. A broader tradition in moral philosophy also treats anger as a second-personal address that implicitly requests acknowledgement of standing. Adam Smith captures the point by suggesting that anger seeks to make the wrongdoer sensible that the injured person did not deserve such treatment, while Darwall frames anger as carrying an implicit RSVP: the target is asked to acknowledge that harm has been done and that reciprocal standing has been violated. This recognition-centred picture matters for the chapter's wider argument because it clarifies how modern communication systems can deform anger's rationality without denying that anger is rational. If anger's primary aim is recognition, then a communication ecology that systematically blocks uptake, rewards escalation, or substitutes visibility for acknowledgement will push anger away

from communicative repair and toward harder, more punitive forms. In other words, retribution can emerge as a secondary trajectory when recognition is refused or structurally foreclosed. Treating recognition as independent from punishment avoids the mistake of redefining every painful acknowledgement as covert revenge. Recognition can be sought even when the target's suffering is irrelevant or undesirable, because the point is epistemic and moral recalibration rather than payback. Anger's nature, on this view, is best understood as heterogeneous and socially shaped, yet still reason-responsive, with its communicative aims increasingly captured by systems that profit from conflict rather than resolution.

Anger as communicative leverage

Oliveira e Silva's UCL doctoral thesis confronts the familiar warning that oppressed people should suppress anger for the sake of 'effectiveness' and argues, against that tradition, that anger can function as a rational and productive force in political struggle when its aim is recognition rather than payback. The standard objection, associated with Martha Nussbaum and other critics of anger, is the inefficacy claim: anger may alert people to injustice, but acting in anger supposedly derails reform, hardens conflict, and invites retaliation. Feminist and anti-racist thinkers reject that conclusion, but their defences are often treated as moral exhortations rather than direct refutations. The point here is not to romanticise anger, but to state a more exact thesis suited to this chapter: anger's efficacy depends on its communicative grammar, and that grammar is systematically reshaped by contemporary media systems that monetise escalation while weakening the conditions for acknowledgement. A key move is to treat anger as conative and communicative, not merely expressive. If anger's built-in aim is retribution, then the critic's suspicion looks plausible: public anger becomes a politics of punishment, predictable backlash, and moral theatre. But if anger often aims at recognition, it functions differently. Recognition is an epistemic demand: the target must register that a wrong occurred, that the injured party did not deserve it, and that the standing between persons or groups is not unilateral. This view appears across moral philosophy, from Adam Smith's claim that anger seeks to make the offender grasp the undeservedness of the injury, to Stephen Darwall's account of angry attitudes as addressing their objects with an implicit demand for acknowledgement. Under this description, anger is not only an inner heat but a message with a practical structure: it attempts to alter what others know, concede, or publicly accept. Empirical work in collective action research reinforces this shift. Studies in the field commonly distinguish two pathways into collective mobilisation: an anger pathway, in which group anger is triggered by perceived unfair disadvantage, and an instrumental reasoning pathway, in which people weigh the likelihood that collective action can produce change. The inefficacy claim predicts that anger should bias groups toward destructive, retaliatory tactics, while instrumental reasoning should underwrite constructive, reform-oriented action. Yet evidence repeatedly fails to fit that moralistic division. In a well-known study of German students facing a state-mandated tuition increase, anger correlated positively with constructive actions such as petitions, demonstrations, and information dissemination, not with the kind of payback behaviours the inefficacy thesis expects. Comparable patterns appear in other contexts of group disadvantage, including settings marked by historical conflict, suggesting that anger frequently energises actions aimed at changing policy rather than harming opponents. The simplest interpretation is that anger, in these cases, expresses an insistence on being taken seriously as a political subject, and that such insistence can be instrumentally rational. This does not mean anger never turns destructive. It means destructiveness is moderated by context, which matters for any account of anger's

rationality in a manufactured environment. When people believe change is impossible, punitive or disruptive tactics become more attractive, partly because there is 'nothing to lose'. Low perceived efficacy, unresponsive authorities, and repeated dismissal of grievances can push anger away from recognition and toward retaliation. That shift is not a metaphysical truth about anger's essence, but a situational reconfiguration of its aim under conditions of blocked communication. This is precisely where the contemporary media ecology becomes decisive: when platforms amplify rage while denying durable pathways for acknowledgement, anger is nudged toward the 'nothing to lose' posture as a default. The same empirical literature complicates the 'out-group' reason for pessimism, the idea that communicating anger only antagonises dominant groups and therefore reduces the chance of reform. Experimental work on intergroup emotion suggests that anger communication can increase support for conciliatory or constructive policies among dominant-group observers, sometimes more than neutral factual communication and even more than hopeful appeals. A study using American reactions to Syrian-American relations, for example, found that exposure to an anger-framed message increased support for conciliatory measures relative to neutral and hope conditions. Similar effects have been reported in contexts of race relations and other intergroup tensions. The mechanism is especially important: where critics imagine fear and coercion, some studies find that anger can elicit empathy, provided the anger is perceived as appropriate to the injustice. In other words, anger can recruit moral attention and sympathetic understanding when it is legible as justified, and when audiences still possess the interpretive resources to see it as such. For this chapter's purposes, the conclusion is double-edged. Anger can be instrumentally rational and socially productive because it can function as a demand for recognition that mobilises in-groups and can, under certain conditions, move out-groups toward conciliatory responses. But these conditions are fragile. Digital communication systems that reward provocation, compress context, and normalise performative outrage systematically undermine appropriateness judgements and the possibility of acknowledgement. Under those pressures, anger's recognition-aim is continuously frustrated, and the emotion is retooled into spectacle, punishment, and endless escalation, a structurally induced slide from communicative leverage into manufactured dysfunction.

Rational anger and engineered miscommunication

Amia Srinivasan's essay[61] 'The Aptness of Anger' is a useful starting point for concluding this section because it names the political trick at the centre of modern affect: public culture speaks about anger in ways that protect those most threatened by it. That diagnosis aligns with this chapter's focus on manufacturing anger inside contemporary communication systems. The point has not been to praise anger as morally pure, nor to condemn it as irrational noise, but to clarify how anger can be rational in more than one sense, and how those rational capacities are now repeatedly exploited, accelerated, and redirected toward miscommunication. The route taken has been foundational rather than merely rhetorical. Instead of arguing about anger in the abstract, the analysis treated anger as the contested phenomenon itself and asked what it is, what it does, and what kinds of rational assessment it can bear. That approach exposes why the classic dispute persists. Disagreement over anger often turns out to be disagreement over different kinds of rationality: whether anger helps or hinders thinking, whether it advances or sabotages practical aims, whether it tracks reasons or merely expresses disturbance, and

[61] Srinivasan, A. (2018) 'The Aptness of Anger', Journal of Political Philosophy, 26(2), pp. 123–144.

whether it can contribute to knowledge or only to bias. That set of disputes generates four linked tasks: a defensible account of anger's nature; an account of its instrumental rationality; an account of its normative rationality, meaning its responsiveness to reasons; and an account of its epistemic rationality, meaning its contribution to justified belief. Once those tasks are taken seriously, the traditional picture of anger as essentially retributive starts to look less like a discovery about human nature and more like a socially stabilising simplification. Anger is not best understood as a single hard-wired programme that reliably aims at payback. The more plausible view is that anger is heterogenous, shaped by cooperative life, local norms, and the available repertoires of expression. That matters for a chapter concerned with media design because heterogeneity makes anger easy to format. A system can invite one kind of anger while discouraging another: indignation rather than grief, shaming rather than repair, punishment rather than recognition. Under those conditions, old debates about whether anger is 'irrational' become less informative than the question of which versions of anger are being produced and rewarded. A key correction follows from treating anger as often communicative rather than merely punitive. In many cases anger seeks recognition, not suffering: it presses the target, or the witnessing public, to register that a wrong occurred and that the injured party did not deserve it. That recognitional structure helps explain why anger can be instrumentally rational in the pursuit of change without reducing it to vengeance. It also explains why anger can fail. If recognition is systematically denied, anger can escalate, harden, and drift toward retribution, not because retribution is anger's essence, but because the communicative aim is blocked. In a digital environment, that blockage can be structural. Platform incentives reward escalation, and public attention is distributed in ways that make acknowledgement costly and denial profitable. Recognition becomes rare not because people have grown indifferent, but because outrage is more easily monetised than repair. Normative rationality becomes sharper under these conditions. Anger can be appropriate or inappropriate; it can respond to reasons or fail to do so; it can coexist with norm violations without collapsing into mere chaos. Treating anger as reason-responsive is crucial because it makes another possibility visible: a failure to feel anger can itself be a rational failure in contexts where there are clear reasons for it, especially where injustice is normalised. That matters for the political economy of communication because one aim of manufactured anger is not simply to inflame feeling, but to displace fitting anger onto safer targets, while eroding the capacity for anger where it would threaten power. The epistemic question then becomes unavoidable. Anger can distort belief, but it can also justify belief, at least defeasibly, by functioning as a reason-giving experience regarding evaluative reality: harm, offence, degradation, injustice. This is most vivid in non-ideal conditions where 'outlaw' anger is the first signal that something is wrong, before the available public language can articulate it. If anger sometimes plays that role, then condemning it as epistemically irrational becomes a high-bar claim. The critique must show not only that anger misleads, but that its misleading tendencies outweigh its indispensable capacity to register wrongs that official narratives deny. This is where the chapter's theme returns with force. Digital systems do not merely host anger; they can engineer its triggers, targets, and tempo. The rationality of anger becomes a resource to be harvested. Anger's instrumental logic becomes a tool for engagement metrics; anger's normative language becomes a weapon in status games; anger's epistemic immediacy becomes a shortcut around deliberation. The end result is an inversion of communicative value: the planned obsolescence of communication turns anger into a grammar that produces miscommunication as an everyday condition and discommunication as a systemic goal, so that instead of cultivating unity, trust, and consent, the system manufactures dissent,

hatred, rage, division, and alienation across groups. An engineered miscommunication is discommunication.

Reason for anger

Franky Schaeffer's 'A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality' (1982) treats[62] 'neutral science' as a rhetorical costume, and that claim translates cleanly into the present chapter's concern with how anger is framed as irrational whenever it threatens the moral authority of institutions. The text begins from a simple provocation: science, medicine, and expert culture present themselves as reasonable, pluralistic, and above ideology, yet they operate inside philosophical commitments and political incentives that shape what questions are asked, what technologies are built, and what outcomes are treated as 'practical'. Neutrality, in this account, is not an absence of values but a strategic hiding of values, and the hiding works because 'fashion' protects experts from scrutiny while discouraging ordinary speech. When people defer with phrases like 'what can one person do?' or 'the experts have agreed', responsibility is evacuated and replaced by consensus language. That evacuation is central to a grammar of outrage. Outrage is not merely anger at harm; it is anger at the framing of harm as normal, necessary, hygienic, or inevitable. Schaeffer repeatedly targets a pattern in which morally charged decisions are re-described as technical decisions, after which dissent becomes 'emotional', 'unscientific', or 'reactionary'. This manoeuvre converts ethical conflict into a credibility contest: the institution keeps its moral power by presenting itself as neutral, while opponents are reduced to irrationality. In such a setting, anger becomes more than a feeling. It becomes one of the few remaining forms of language that can signal that something has been moralised while pretending not to be moralised. The argument also insists that science cannot be separated from world-view. Schaeffer sketches a genealogy in which early modern science emerged in a cultural frame that assumed order, intelligibility, and a meaningful cosmos, then claims that contemporary 'humanistic' science rejects transcendent moral law while still depending on assumptions of order to make experimentation possible. The polemical point is not merely theological. It is about contradiction and authority: institutions deny moral foundations while making moral decisions, and then they treat those decisions as the only rational option. That is how a 'myth of neutrality' can legitimise policies that would otherwise be openly debated as moral violence. Schaeffer's most provocative pages hinge on medicine and population control, where 'problem-solving' is imagined as limiting life. He frames this as an 'agenda of death' justified through scarcity arguments and managerial logic, and he treats corporate and governmental language as a form of sanitisation: killing becomes 'therapy', coercion becomes 'planning', and enforcement becomes 'remedial measures'. The text is saturated with examples of how euphemism absorbs moral shock. That linguistic absorption is one of the chapter's key themes: communication systems can reduce ethical reality into administrative phrases, which then invites a specific kind of anger, the anger provoked not only by what is done, but by the way language is used to render it clean, distant, and normal. A further strand concerns consensus as social power. Schaeffer describes a world in which 'the scholars agree' replaces older sources of authority, forming a monolithic moral community that treats dissent as backward. Here anger appears as an anti-consensus affect. It refuses the comfort of the closed box. It interrupts what looks like calm expertise by insisting that calmness can be complicity. In that sense, anger functions as an epistemic alarm: a signal that a social order is disciplining perception by

[62] Schaeffer, F. (1982) A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books.

restricting what counts as speakable. The chapter's wider focus on manufactured anger sharpens the point. If neutrality myths suppress legitimate conflict by delegitimising emotion, the likely consequence is not the disappearance of anger but its re-routing. Anger displaced from direct moral argument often returns as spectacle, conspiracy, or tribal hostility, because the language for principled dispute has been withdrawn. When institutions monopolise 'reason' and outsource 'feeling' to the public as a stigma, outrage becomes easier to trigger and harder to resolve. The system produces anger and then uses anger as evidence that dissenters are irrational. That loop does not create unity, trust, or consent. It manufactures dissent, hostility, and alienation, because the public sphere is trained to mistake moral argument for emotional noise, while treating managerial language as moral innocence.

When Art Learns to Be Angry

Franky Schaeffer's 'A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality' (1982) describes cultural 'neutrality' as a gatekeeping technology, and that diagnosis fits this chapter's concern with how anger is disciplined, redirected, and made useful to the managers of public feeling. The argument begins with a confession of failure and a shift of emphasis: the problem is not only that religious communities have often withdrawn from the arts, but that the contemporary cultural marketplace is structured to reward one moral vocabulary while branding its rivals as sectarian noise. This is where anger becomes politically interesting. Anger is not merely a private temper; it is an index of exclusion, a signal that the rules of recognition are not being applied evenly, and a refusal to accept that 'pluralism' is being performed while access is being controlled. Schaeffer's central claim is that the arts, like politics and law, operate under a myth of neutrality. The myth works by treating secular humanist assumptions as the default, and everything else as special pleading. Under such conditions, Christian art is not rejected as poor art but as improper presence, an intrusion of belief into a sphere that pretends to have none. The rhetoric of impartiality becomes a moral weapon: the gatekeeper can censor without calling it censorship, because the exclusion is explained as professionalism, standards, or general interest. In this framing, anger is the rational response to a disguised asymmetry. The public is told that only one kind of moral language counts as 'culture', while all others are reduced to 'religion', a minor category suitable for separate shelves, separate shops, and separate audiences. The best-seller list example functions as a model of manufactured visibility. Lists presented as descriptive tools become prescriptive instruments: they boost sales, attract reviews, and place selected works into the broader conversation, which then shapes cultural reality. The core complaint is not merely statistical but structural. If counts are taken only from 'mainline' venues while excluding sales channels associated with certain communities, the resulting 'public taste' is a curated illusion presented as neutral fact. Once the illusion is installed, it becomes self-reinforcing: what appears on lists becomes what is discussed, and what is discussed becomes what counts. Anger here is directed at the architecture of attention, not only at particular reviewers or editors. The system can then treat the excluded group's protest as proof of its irrationality, thereby converting outrage into further justification for exclusion. Schaeffer extends the argument to a broader mechanism that might be called censorship by neglect. Rather than banning, institutions can ignore, delay, refuse appointments, and claim that the content is 'one-sided' while airing programmes that openly advocate a rival worldview under the label of balance. In this way, neutrality becomes a performance that protects power. The effect is not only cultural but psychological. When a community repeatedly sees its work framed as parochial, it may internalise the judgement, retreat further, or respond with a compensatory

style that becomes louder, cruder, or more punitive. That feedback loop is directly relevant to this chapter: institutional framing can provoke anger and then cite the resulting anger as evidence that the excluded voice should not be heard. The discussion of language reform and textbook ‘sex fairness’ is used to illustrate how control over words becomes control over reality. The claim is that the dominant moral project can rewrite inherited language while denouncing rivals as censors. Whether one agrees with Schaeffer’s positions or not, the rhetorical pattern is clear: a programme of value imposition is narrated as liberation, and resistance is narrated as repression. That inversion is one of the most efficient ways to delegitimise anger. Once anger is coded as reactionary, the institution does not need to answer the objection; it only needs to manage the optics. A further reversal appears in the claim that ‘radical’ secular art is often the establishment masquerading as rebellion. If the consensus already controls galleries, networks, and reviews, then transgression becomes a safe style rather than a genuine risk. The outsider is the one who violates the consensus, not the one who repeats it. In that sense, anger is linked to moral and aesthetic nonconformity: it is the energy of a voice trying to enter a space that calls itself open while enforcing unwritten rules of belonging. The final thrust is about cultural inheritance. Schaeffer argues that modern secular culture continues to consume older religious art because it cannot live inside its own philosophical reductions without borrowing beauty, order, and transcendence from the past. This is presented as hypocrisy, but it is also a clue about the emotional economy of culture: even when official ideologies deny higher meanings, audiences still hunger for them. That hunger is managed by gatekeepers through selective permission, and anger erupts when people notice the contradiction between proclaimed pluralism and practical exclusion. In the logic of this chapter, that anger should not be treated as mere resentment. It is a contest over who gets to supply the symbols, the stories, and the moral atmosphere of public life.

3.5. Anger management

Choosing anger

Tim LaHaye’s book[63] 'Anger Is a Choice' opens with the blunt claim that anger is chosen, and that claim becomes newly consequential inside a digital environment where anger is repeatedly invited, rewarded, and converted into social power. The domestic scene of Marty exploding over bicycles in the driveway reads, on the surface, like a familiar morality tale: a man lashes out, the household braces, and a minor irritation becomes a family-wide weather system. Yet the episode also models a core mechanism of contemporary communication: disproportion becomes normal, and a small trigger becomes a licence for a larger performance. Marty’s anger is not excused, but it is made legible as a composite state, fed by fear, humiliation, insecurity, debt, workplace threat, and near-accident adrenaline. What appears as a single emotion turns out to be a compressed bundle of pressures that finds a convenient object. That distinction matters for a chapter concerned with manufactured anger. In older moral vocabularies, anger is treated as a personal test of character and self-rule: the agent must govern the feeling, avoid sinful expression, and resolve it quickly. In modern networked settings, anger becomes a medium: an energy that circulates, recruits, signals status, and demands attention. LaHaye’s framework insists that responsibility cannot be outsourced to ‘the feeling’. People may have the capacity for anger, but the outburst is still a choice, and the crucial question is what the

[63] LaHaye, T.F. (1982) Anger Is a Choice. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

anger allows the person to do. This is the practical hinge. The cited passage from Ernst G. Beier and Evans G. Valens reverses the comforting story that behaviour follows feeling, proposing instead that feelings are often generated because they provide permission. Anger can function as an internal credential for acts a person already wants to perform but cannot openly justify: domination, intimidation, withdrawal of care, or the right to hurt back while appearing morally compelled. In the architecture of digital communication, that reversal becomes systemic rather than merely psychological. Platforms do not simply 'trigger' anger; they offer ready-made reasons to stay angry, and they supply moral alibis for aggression in the form of righteous language, simplified villains, and endless provocations. The more a person thinks about it, the angrier the person gets is no longer an accidental spiral; it is a designed loop. This is why the claim 'anger is a choice' does not mean anger is always cold and calculated. It means choice is distributed across micro-decisions: what to click, what to replay, what to share, what to interpret as an insult, what to treat as a threat, and which community's script to adopt. The system makes the angriest choice the easiest choice. LaHaye's discussion of 'righteous indignation' versus selfish anger maps onto the grammar of outrage. The text distinguishes anger at injustice inflicted on others from anger driven by personal injury, status threat, and wounded pride. In practice, contemporary outrage collapses this distinction. Public moral language allows personal resentment to wear an ethical mask, while genuine moral concern is pushed toward theatrical escalation to remain visible. The result is not simply more anger but more confusion about what anger is for: correction, care, and repair are replaced by shaming, symbolic punishment, and the satisfaction of being seen on the right side. Even the advice to avoid nursing wrath past sundown reads differently in a world without sundown feeds. Communication never ends; anger can always be topped up, refreshed, and revalidated by the next clip. The material also highlights a second theme: anger is rarely about the stated object. Bikes in the driveway are a surface cue, not the source. In networked environments, the same displacement becomes political and cultural. Anger attaches to the most available target, not the most causal one. A person is furious at a stranger online while the deeper drivers may be precarious work, loss of status, fear of irrelevance, or helplessness in the face of institutional power. The outrage economy thrives on this displacement because it is safer for systems when anger is misdirected. It protects the conditions producing frustration by keeping attention fixed on symbolic enemies. LaHaye ends this portion by turning toward forgiveness as a boundary against what begins as justified anger and becomes malign over time. Within this book's framework, the boundary problem is intensified: digital systems specialise in keeping anger unresolved because unresolved anger produces the most engagement. The personal struggle described here becomes a social design problem. Anger can be a legitimate signal, but a communication order that continuously profits from that signal has an interest in preventing resolution, reconciliation, and trust. That is how a moral vocabulary of self-control is absorbed into an infrastructure of perpetual provocation.

Anger as organisational tool

Brett Beasley's article[64] 'Getting angry at work can help you stand up for what's right' (2017), examines how anger operates not merely as an individual emotion but as a managed, channelled, and increasingly instrumentalised force within modern organisational life. Within the framework of this chapter, anger appears neither as a spontaneous eruption nor as a moral

[64] Beasley, B. (2017) 'Getting angry at work can help you stand up for what's right', Harvard Business Review

accident, but as a regulated resource that contemporary institutions simultaneously fear, require, and exploit. Anger has long been treated in organisations as a disruptive residue of human irrationality, something to be suppressed in the name of professionalism, neutrality, and efficiency. Yet empirical research complicates this image. Under certain conditions, anger functions as a catalyst for moral action. It mobilises speech where silence is rewarded, disrupts conformity, and enables individuals to confront wrongdoing despite personal risk. In this sense, anger becomes a counterweight to fear. Fear inhibits action by amplifying perceived costs, while anger narrows attention around perceived injustice and lowers the threshold for intervention. This is why moral anger, rather than empathy or guilt, so often precedes whistleblowing, confrontation, and refusal. Studies cited in organisational psychology demonstrate that individuals who intervene in situations of clear injustice are more likely to display visible signs of anger than those who remain passive. Anger, in these cases, correlates with decisiveness. It transforms moral judgement into action by supplying the motivational force required to overcome inertia and social pressure. This dynamic is particularly relevant in hierarchical environments, where silence is structurally incentivised and dissent is costly. Anger supplies the energy that allows moral perception to cross the boundary into moral behaviour. However, the same research also reveals the fundamental instability of anger as a moral guide. Anger is notoriously selective, unevenly distributed, and deeply shaped by proximity and self-interest. Individuals consistently overestimate how angry they will feel when confronted with injustice and underestimate the dampening effects of context, authority, and organisational culture. When anger does arise, it is often personal rather than principled, directed more toward perceived insult or threat than toward abstract injustice. This creates a paradox: the emotion most capable of producing moral courage is also the least reliable in its moral targeting. Within contemporary organisations, this paradox is not resolved but managed. Anger is neither eliminated nor freely expressed; it is channelled. Leaders are encouraged to regulate anger through techniques of naming, reframing, and reappraisal. The explicit goal is emotional control, but the implicit effect is moral deflection. By translating anger into cognitive strategies, organisations preserve functionality while neutralising disruption. Anger is allowed to exist only insofar as it can be rendered productive, safe, and aligned with institutional goals. This regulatory logic mirrors broader patterns in digital and managerial culture, where emotions are not suppressed but formatted. Moral anger is encouraged when it reinforces organisational values, diversity statements, or compliance narratives, but discouraged when it targets structural injustice, power asymmetries, or leadership decisions. The distinction between ‘moral anger’ and ‘toxic anger’ thus becomes a managerial classification rather than a moral one. Anger is judged not by its object but by its consequences for organisational stability. The emphasis on action further complicates this picture. Moral anger is increasingly defined as legitimate only when it leads to measurable outcomes: reports filed, procedures followed, training completed. Anger that does not translate into sanctioned action is dismissed as performative or grandstanding. Yet this criterion risks collapsing moral evaluation into bureaucratic effectiveness. It transforms anger from a response to injustice into a compliance mechanism, rewarding expression only when it feeds existing institutional pathways. From the perspective of this book, the significance of workplace anger lies not in its therapeutic management but in its structural production. Modern organisations generate anger through overload, surveillance, precarity, and symbolic injustice, while simultaneously offering tools to neutralise its disruptive potential. Anger becomes both symptom and input, a signal of moral friction that is carefully absorbed rather than allowed to transform the system that produced it. What emerges is not an ethics of anger but an economy of anger. Courage is praised, but only within controlled

channels. Outrage is tolerated, but only when it aligns with pre-approved narratives. The result is a culture in which anger is constantly present yet rarely transformative, continuously activated yet systematically defanged. In this environment, anger no longer threatens the organisation; it sustains it.

Anger as stagecraft

In Shimin Zhang, Shenjiang Mo and Wu Liu's paper[65] 'Anger for Good? Unethical-Behavior-Targeted Leader Anger Expression and Its Consequences on Team Outcomes', leader anger becomes a communicative technology that can manufacture moral order inside organisations, turning outrage into a visible script that tells a team what counts as acceptable conduct and what will be punished. The interest is not anger as a private feeling, but anger as a public signal aimed at unethical behaviour, staged in front of an audience of colleagues who then interpret the performance as evidence about fairness, protection, and belonging. In contemporary work cultures, where 'ethics' often floats as a slogan and compliance becomes a box-ticking ritual, anger can paradoxically appear as the only emotion that still looks sincere enough to anchor norms. In this sense, anger is not merely a reaction; it is an instrument of governance, a mechanism for coordinating perceptions, and a medium through which moral boundaries become legible. Most research on leader anger has treated it as corrosive, linking it to intimidation, reduced liking, negative emotional contagion, and retaliation or withdrawal. That story often fits anger that is vague, misdirected, or attached to performance deficiencies. Zhang, Mo and Liu shift the lens: what happens when anger is targeted at wrongdoing that threatens the group's moral equilibrium, such as harassment, theft, fraud, or other forms of unethical conduct? Their argument is that this targeted anger can function as a fairness cue. Teams rarely possess full information about how punishment is distributed, who is protected, who is sacrificed, and whether management will enforce standards consistently. Under such uncertainty, people rely on readily available signs to decide whether it is safe to invest in the group, to cooperate, and to contribute beyond formal duties. A leader's anger, expressed in response to an ethical breach, becomes a short cut for collective judgement: it broadcasts that the leader attributes responsibility, intends correction, and recognises the violation as an affront to the group's shared order. The core mechanism is a 'punishment-based distributive justice climate': a shared sense that negative consequences are allocated according to intelligible rules rather than personal favour, tribal loyalty, or managerial convenience. When a leader publicly condemns unethical behaviour, the team can read the episode as reassurance that moral violations will not be rewarded, that victims will not be abandoned, and that the group's symbolic boundaries still matter. This can produce effects that resemble social cement: higher team organisational citizenship behaviour, stronger willingness to remain a team, and greater viability over time. In other words, anger can help stabilise cooperation not by being pleasant, but by being interpretable as protection against exploitation and exclusion, which are the two silent fears that haunt collective life at work. Yet this is not a romantic defence of fury. The paper's most revealing twist is that anger only works as a fairness signal if the surrounding leadership style does not sabotage its meaning. This is where 'moral decoupling' matters: the habit of separating ethical judgement from performance judgement. A leader can express moral

[65] Zhang, S., Mo, S. and Liu, W. (2023). Anger for good? Unethical-behavior-targeted leader anger expression and its consequences on team outcomes. Journal of Organizational Behavior. doi:https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2756.

condemnation and still reward the wrongdoer for ‘results’. In that case, the anger becomes theatre without consequence, a performance that communicates ambiguity rather than justice. The team receives mixed messages: wrongdoing is verbally condemned, but materially tolerated. Under moral decoupling, anger stops being reliable information about punishment allocation and becomes another episode in the organisation’s routine production of appearances. The very emotion that should clarify the moral grammar of the workplace instead intensifies cynicism, because it reveals a split between what is said and what is done. This makes the argument politically relevant to modern anger economies. Anger in contemporary institutions is frequently encouraged as an expressive style while its practical effects are neutralised by managerial calculation. Outrage is permitted, even cultivated, as long as it remains safely symbolic: it can be posted, branded, channelled into training modules, and turned into a narrative of organisational virtue, without altering incentive structures. Zhang, Mo and Liu describe a condition in which anger regains efficacy only when it is joined to consistent evaluation and credible punishment. If not, anger becomes part of the organisation’s dramaturgy, producing the illusion of moral governance while protecting the real logic of utility and performance. For a chapter concerned with the rationality of anger, the implication is straightforward: anger looks ‘rational’ inside groups when it reduces uncertainty about fairness and when its signals align with outcomes. It is not rational because it is calm, but because it can function as a legible rule in a complex moral environment. The same emotion becomes irrational, or at least socially destructive, when it is detached from consistent judgement and turns into performative noise. In that scenario, anger is still expressed, but the team learns that moral language is merely decoration, and that the true constitution of the workplace is written elsewhere, in rewards, protection, and impunity.

Napoleonic anger machines

In Garret Keizer’s essay[66] ‘Napoleon’s Test’ from The Enigma of Anger, the scene of a woman forced to ‘prove’ rape before a laughing court becomes a template for how modern institutions manufacture anger by turning truth into a rigged performance. The test is designed to fail: vindication is promised, but the premises are false and the rules are controlled by the powerful. What looks like justice is a stage prop, and the victim is required to participate in the fiction that negates her experience. The cruelty is not only in the denial, but in the conversion of suffering into spectacle, where humiliation is renewed with every attempt to satisfy an impossible demand. Rage in this setting is not an accident or a pathology. Rage is the predictable output of a system that offers recognition only through a game that cannot be won. This is the first lesson of the false test: it places ‘the sword’ in someone’s hand, then tells that person that dignity will be restored if the blade can be inserted into a moving scabbard. The subject holds the means of ending the farce, yet cannot see it, because the whole structure of the scene trains attention away from the obvious. That is how manufactured anger works: agency remains technically available, but perceptually unavailable. The victim is kept inside a choreography of effort, shame, and self-doubt. Each failure tightens the insinuation that the wrong did not happen, or that the wrong is somehow the victim’s fault. Anger grows here as a trapped energy, a moral force that cannot reach its proper object without breaking the rules of the performance. The anger is reasonable, but its pathways are blocked until it becomes fury.

[66] Keizer, G. (2002) ‘Napoleon’s Test’, in The Enigma of Anger: Essays on a Sometimes Deadly Sin, New York: HarperCollins.

Keizer treats this not simply as a story about sexual violence, but as a parable of everyday moral life under asymmetric power. People are routinely assigned tests that promise exoneration: prove sincerity, prove competence, prove worthiness, prove belonging. The formula is familiar in workplaces, schools, bureaucracies, and media environments. It is the demand to demonstrate the self on hostile terms, inside metrics and rituals that were never built to recognise what is actually at stake. The test claims neutrality, but neutrality is the mask of domination. The person subjected to it may be certain of the truth, yet the very act of entering the test concedes the lie that truth must first be authorised by the gatekeepers of the game. The essay's pivot is the recognition that anger often begins the moment a person accepts those terms. The original injury may be real, but the rage becomes chronic when the person tries to win vindication within a structure that converts every effort into further defeat. The sword is held tighter, the concentration increases, the body sweats with the hope that one more attempt will do it. The tormentor's amusement mirrors the subject's determination. That symmetry is part of the trap. The longer the struggle continues, the more the subject invests, and the more unbearable it becomes to admit the game is false. Anger then starts to feed on itself: not only anger at the original wrong, but anger at the humiliations required to obtain acknowledgement of the wrong, and anger at the self for failing to meet a demand that should never have been accepted. Keizer's autobiographical sections translate the parable into institutional life. Supervising teachers and managing a system of pride, dysfunction, and scarcity, he becomes angry because he is tasked with fixing contradictions that cannot be fixed. The promise of 'balance' and 'solutions' resembles Napoleon's scabbard: an idealised slot into which reality is supposed to fit if only the right technique is applied. Meanwhile, the surrounding environment weaponises deprivation by turning potential allies into enemies, making resentment travel sideways rather than upward. Here anger is manufactured as misdirection. It is difficult to identify a single target, so fury disperses, attaches to the nearest face, and becomes both guilt and exhaustion. The essay ends by describing occasions when anger lifts a person off the ground, then must be shed to reach another orbit. Writing, speaking, and acting can drain rancour, replacing it with a colder honesty, even compassion. Yet the unsettling point remains: institutions often prefer anger as spectacle to anger as refusal. Rage is permitted when it burns fuel in the crowd; rage is punished when it threatens to destroy the test itself. The rational task, then, is not to eliminate anger, but to identify the false scabbards people are being taught to chase, and to see whether the sword in hand is actually meant for vindication or for breaking the stage.

Anger as error and miscommunication

In Lucius Annaeus Seneca's De Ira (On Anger), written[67] in the mid first century AD and addressed to his brother Novatus, anger is defined not as an unavoidable human impulse but as a cognitive and moral error that distorts judgement, corrodes social bonds, and ultimately undermines communication itself. Seneca's treatise belongs to his Dialogi and unfolds within the Stoic philosophical project of freeing human beings from slavery to the passions through reason and virtue. Anger, in this framework, is not a neutral emotion to be managed but a destructive passion that must be eradicated, because any attempt to merely 'control' it leaves intact the false beliefs from which it arises. De Ira is structured in three books and divided conceptually into two major parts. The first part is theoretical and diagnostic. Seneca defines anger, describes its manifestations, and asks whether it is natural, voluntary, moderate, or

[67] Seneca, L. A. (2010) De Ira, trans. R. A. Kaster, in Dialogues and Essays, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

capable of being eliminated altogether. The second part is therapeutic and practical, offering advice on how anger can be prevented, weakened, or extinguished in both private and public life. This dual structure mirrors the Stoic conviction that ethical reform requires both correct understanding and disciplined practice. One cannot heal anger simply by condemning its excesses; the underlying misjudgements that generate it must be exposed. Seneca defines anger broadly as rage, wrath, indignation, and the desire to punish. What unites these forms is not intensity but orientation: anger is directed outward, toward harm, retaliation, and domination. For Stoicism, this orientation already marks it as contrary to human nature. Humans are constituted for cooperation, mutual assistance, and rational exchange, whereas anger seeks separation, destruction, and the suspension of deliberation. In this sense, anger is not merely socially disruptive but anti-social in principle. It transforms citizens into enemies and dialogue into combat. A central Stoic premise in De Ira is that the passions arise in a rational mind through error. Anger is not pre-rational instinct but a defective belief about value, harm, and justice. Seneca inherits this view largely from earlier Stoic philosophy, particularly the work of Chrysippus on the passions, which treated emotions as false judgements rather than irrational forces independent of reason. Although Seneca may also have drawn on later Stoic sources such as Posidonius, modern scholarship suggests that the apparent differences between these thinkers were exaggerated by later interpreters, and that Seneca's account remains fundamentally Chrysippean. Anger, on this view, is reason gone wrong, not reason overwhelmed by nature. This cognitive account explains Seneca's uncompromising position on anger. Because anger is grounded in misperception, it cannot be safely moderated. To 'use' anger for good ends, such as punishment or correction, is to rely on a faculty already corrupted. Seneca rejects the common argument that anger provides energy, courage, or motivational force. What appears as strength is in fact loss of control. Once anger is admitted, it ceases to obey reason and instead bends reason to its own ends. The metaphor Seneca repeatedly employs is irreversible movement: like a body falling from a height, the angry mind cannot arrest its descent once it has surrendered to passion. The therapeutic programme of De Ira therefore prioritises prevention. Seneca's first aim is that one does not become angry at all; only secondarily does he address how to restrain anger once it has arisen. This ordering is significant. Prevention involves vigilance over impressions, delay in judgement, suspicion toward one's own sense of injury, and careful attention to language. Many of Seneca's practical recommendations concern time, distance, and reinterpretation: postponing reaction, re-describing the offence, imagining alternative explanations, and recalling the fallibility shared by all humans. These techniques are not emotional suppression but epistemic correction. They seek to interrupt the narrative through which anger justifies itself. Seneca's limited concession to restraint acknowledges social reality. Writing for a Roman aristocratic audience accustomed to public authority and punishment, he recognises that anger often appears embedded in institutional roles. Yet even here he insists on a sharp distinction between reasoned correction and vengeful impulse. Punishment, if it occurs, must resemble medical treatment rather than retaliation. Its purpose is restoration of order, not satisfaction of resentment. Vengeance, by contrast, is always evil because it treats harm as a value in itself. Within the broader framework of this book, De Ira can be read as an early analysis of how emotional regimes deform communication. Anger replaces interpretation with certainty, converts disagreement into moral violation, and collapses the space required for understanding. By insisting that anger must be destroyed rather than managed, Seneca anticipates a central problem of modern public life: systems that normalise anger as a tool of motivation or cohesion inevitably produce miscommunication and social fragmentation. What presents itself as moral clarity becomes, in Stoic terms, a shared error.

The Fire That Forgets Its Maker

In Lucius Annaeus Seneca's On Anger, translated by Robert A. Kaster, anger appears not as a private feeling but as a social accelerant that turns judgement into spectacle and punishment into contagion. Seneca begins by treating anger as the most 'foul and frenzied' of passions, a brief madness that does not merely dislike an offence but 'rages with an inhuman desire to inflict pain', so reckless that it accepts self-destruction as the price of harming another. This is crucial for understanding how anger becomes politically and institutionally useful. A passion that is 'shut off from rational deliberation' is easily recruited by any system that profits from arousal, because it supplies action without reflection and certainty without proof. Seneca's portrait of the angry body is therefore more than moral theatre: blazing eyes, clenched teeth, broken breath, stamping feet, and inarticulate speech are the outward signs of a mind that has surrendered the labour of interpretation. Once a person is forced into that posture, language changes function. Speech becomes a weapon, not a medium of understanding. Seneca insists that anger makes itself obvious. Other passions can be hidden, but anger 'thrusts itself forward' and announces itself in the face. In a culture that rewards visibility, this is not a disadvantage. The angered body becomes a signal, a broadcast, an invitation to alignment. Seneca's famous catalogue of anger's costs, suits and countersuits, cities levelled, leaders murdered at tables and in forums, is not only historical rhetoric; it describes what happens when anger scales, when it moves from the household to the crowd, from the individual to the assembly. At that point anger no longer merely punishes wrongs. It reorganises social bonds by converting roles into enemies: father into enemy, son into parricide, mother into stepmother, fellow citizen into foreigner, king into tyrant. In other words, anger manufactures dissent by breaking the grammar of mutual recognition and replacing it with a grammar of suspicion and retaliation. Seneca then clarifies anger's logic. Anger is typically defined as a desire for vengeance, or a desire to punish someone thought to have harmed one unjustly. Even when the wrong has not yet occurred, intention is treated as injury: the mere plan to harm counts as harm already. This makes anger exceptionally expandable. It can attach itself not only to acts but to motives, not only to what happened but to what might happen. That elasticity is what makes anger so easy to mobilise in moralised climates. A person does not need certainty, only an 'impression of being wronged', and Seneca notes how easily quasi-anger imitates anger proper, like children striking the ground after a fall. The grievance may be theatrical, but the desire for payback becomes real enough to drive behaviour. Yet Seneca refuses the comforting excuse that anger is simply animal nature. Animals display ferocity, alarms, and impulses, but anger, he argues, belongs to the human mind precisely because it is reason's enemy and therefore can arise only where reason resides. This is an uncomfortable claim for any society that tries to excuse its own cruelty as instinct. Anger is not the eruption of nature against civilisation; it is civilisation's own capacity for self-corruption. Humans alone possess deliberation and foresight, and humans alone can deform these powers into a passion that imitates justice while serving revenge. From this Seneca draws the normative conclusion: anger is not 'in accord with nature' because human nature is oriented toward mutual assistance, while anger is oriented toward harm and secession. He grants that correction and scolding are sometimes necessary, but he separates discipline from fury. The lawful healer may inflict pain as a remedy, like a physician who prunes, forbids, bleeds, or amputates, yet the aim remains restoration rather than destruction. In this sense Seneca offers a model of authority that does not require rage to be effective. Punishment can be calibrated, and the harshest penalties reserved, not because anger demands blood, but because the community

must be instructed and protected without becoming addicted to cruelty. The most strategically important claim arrives when Seneca rejects the argument that anger is a useful ally, especially in war or crisis, because it 'raises our spirits' and supplies flame to courage. His response is surgical. Harmful agents are easier to keep out than to control once admitted. Reason rules only while it remains unmixed with passions; once polluted, it becomes their slave. Anger is compared to a leap from a cliff: at the start there is choice, but after the jump there is only descent. This is the point where anger becomes infrastructural. A system that repeatedly invites people to 'admit' anger, to grant it 'sovereign right', trains them into irreversible momentum, where speech, judgement, and action are carried by the passion's weight rather than by understanding. Therefore the practical counsel is preventative: fight the first sparks. The first prickings are where freedom still exists. Once anger 'has begun to carry us off course', the mind does not merely host a passion; it becomes that passion, a transformation of the same faculty that could have resisted it. Seneca's final test is blunt: if someone can act effectively without obeying anger, anger is unnecessary; if anger is stronger than reason, it cannot be limited; if weaker, it adds nothing. The desire to keep a 'healthy mean' of anger is self-deception, because what is being invited in is precisely what dissolves the capacity to measure.

Anger, power, and the ruin of speech

In Lucius Annaeus Seneca's De Ira (On Anger), the concluding movement of the treatise gathers history, politics, and moral psychology into a single argument about how anger corrodes authority, destroys judgement, and ultimately collapses the conditions of human coexistence. Seneca no longer treats anger merely as an individual vice but as a systemic force that deforms power relations, especially where command and obedience are involved. Anger, he argues, is destructive both for those who must endure it from above and for those who wield it from positions of dominance. For those in subordinate positions, anger becomes a form of self-inflicted suffering. Resentment tightens constraint rather than loosening it, much like an animal that worsens its entrapment by struggling against the snare. The more defiantly anger resists necessity, the heavier that necessity becomes. Seneca's point is not a defence of servility but an analysis of psychic damage: anger multiplies pain where endurance might limit it. This is not because injustice disappears through patience, but because anger consumes the very capacities required to navigate constraint intelligently. In this sense, anger functions as a miscommunication between circumstance and response, replacing strategic judgement with inner noise. Yet Seneca insists that anger is even more dangerous when paired with power. When fortune permits rulers to act on what anger urges, destruction follows inevitably. Authority exercised through rage cannot endure, because fear eventually unites those who suffer beneath it. Seneca repeatedly returns to a political insight that resonates strongly with modern conditions: power collapses not when individuals protest, but when shared anguish synchronises. Anger at the top produces anger below, and collective anger eventually finds a target. The historical exempla that dominate this conclusion are not ornamentation but argument. Persian kings such as Darius, Xerxes, Cambyses, and Cyrus appear as figures who mistake cruelty for sovereignty. Their acts are irrational not only morally but strategically. Xerxes' theatrical savagery, Cambyses' catastrophic desert march, and Cyrus' war against a river all illustrate the same pathology: anger redirects political energy away from reality and toward symbolic domination. Rivers, peoples, and armies become objects of vengeance rather than elements of judgement. Power turns inward, performing itself rather than governing. Seneca sharpens this critique by refusing to isolate barbarism as foreign. Roman history, he

insists, offers equally devastating examples. The violence ordered by Sulla, executed by Catiline, and sanctified through public spectacle shows how anger infects institutions. The state itself becomes the medium of rage. Under Gaius Caesar, cruelty accelerates into pure immediacy: executions carried out at night, silenced mouths, pleasure that cannot tolerate delay. Anger here abandons even the pretence of justice. It no longer communicates authority or deterrence but functions as an autotelic performance of domination. The result is not obedience but moral disintegration. Against this catalogue of destruction, Seneca introduces counter-examples of restraint, most notably Antigonus. These scenes are rhetorically crucial. Antigonus does not deny insult or vulnerability; he absorbs it, reframes it, and responds without rage. By doing so, he preserves authority while refusing anger's script. Power remains intelligible, and speech remains possible. Insult does not escalate into violence; mockery does not harden into enmity. Seneca's message is precise: restraint is not weakness but communicative superiority. It keeps open the symbolic space in which authority can be recognised rather than feared. The final pages of De Ira shift from political diagnosis to existential reflection. Anger, Seneca argues, is inseparable from a fantasy of permanence. Feuds presume endless time; vengeance assumes durable selves. Mortality punctures these illusions. Death equalises masters and slaves, kings and subjects, victors and victims. In this light, anger appears absurd as well as wicked. It wastes the brief interval of life on conflicts whose outcomes time will render irrelevant. What anger seeks to cause will happen anyway, without effort. Seneca's ultimate injunction is uncompromising: anger must not be controlled but destroyed. Control presupposes a manageable instrument; anger is not an instrument but a solvent. Once shame has been trampled underfoot, anger recognises no limits and hardens into hatred. The only defence is vigilance at the level of thought, a continual cleansing of judgement before anger takes form. This is not emotional repression but moral hygiene. Within the framework of this book, Seneca's conclusion can be read as an early anatomy of communicative collapse. Anger replaces reason with immediacy, dialogue with force, and judgement with spectacle. It turns language into threat and authority into noise. Against this, Seneca proposes a politics of restraint grounded in mortality, proportion, and the refusal to let passion dictate meaning. In an age where anger circulates faster than reflection, his warning remains structurally intact.

4. Moral Outrage Networks

'The person who is angry at the right things and toward the right people, and also in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time, is praised.'

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

4.1. Rage-baiting and anger-clicking

Angry People Click More

This section examines how the formula 'angry people click more' as a core organising principle of contemporary digital communication and as a decisive shift in the political economy of propaganda. In the classical mass-media environment analysed by Herman and Chomsky, propaganda functioned by narrowing discourse, suppressing dissent and manufacturing consent

through repetition, omission and fear. The central problem in that model was silence: people often recognised falsehoods but lacked the social or institutional capacity to challenge them. In the networked attention economy, this logic has been inverted. Silence is no longer the desired outcome. Platforms and online media increasingly profit from noise, conflict and moral agitation. The key resource is not belief but engagement, and anger has proven to be among the most reliable emotional drivers of clicks, shares and prolonged attention. This transformation can be illustrated through a shift in political allegory. In Andersen's tale of The Emperor's New Clothes, the emperor's nakedness is collectively perceived but publicly denied, while in Václav Havel's image of the greengrocer, the ritual display of an ideological slogan signals conformity rather than conviction. Both figures belong to a world in which overt dissent is risky and consent must be performed. In the contemporary digital environment, the emperor's nakedness is no longer concealed. It is exposed, exaggerated and circulated at scale. Citizens are not disciplined into silence but invited to react, denounce and ridicule. Outrage becomes a participatory obligation. As a result, the dominant affect governing public discourse is not quiet conformity but permanent anger. The concept of 'rage bait', named Oxford's Word of the Year in 2025, formalises a practice that has become structurally embedded in online media. Rage bait refers to content deliberately designed to provoke outrage in order to maximise engagement. Its significance lies not only in cultural usage but in what it reveals about platform logic. Rage bait belongs to a lineage of crisis terms that chart the erosion of shared epistemic standards, from 'truthiness' to 'post-truth'. Yet it marks a further step. Truth is no longer merely secondary to emotion; emotional provocation itself becomes the primary commodity. Anger is treated as a predictable behavioural response that can be engineered, measured and monetised. This logic explains why contemporary misinformation often dispenses with plausibility altogether. In contrast to the classical 'Big Lie', which relied on coherence and monopolised repetition, many digital falsehoods are openly absurd. Flat-earth claims, secret cabals, fabricated atrocities or imminent civilisational collapse circulate without the need to persuade a majority. Their value lies in their capacity to offend common sense and trigger reaction. The more outrageous the claim, the stronger the compulsion to respond, correct or condemn. In this environment, lies do not need to be believed to be profitable. They need to be clickable. The success of a narrative is measured not by compliance but by metrics such as reach, interaction and time spent. Ayolov's concept[68] of the 'manufacture of dissent' captures this structural reversal. Digital platforms no longer require ideological uniformity. Instead, they thrive on polarisation and fragmentation. Slogans circulate in a de facto free market, where ideological consistency is less important than emotional intensity. Every group is encouraged to display its own provocative signs, not to stabilise consensus but to antagonise others. Dissent ceases to be a threat to the system and becomes its primary output. Anger is transformed from a political risk into an infrastructural asset. Platform disclosures have confirmed that this dynamic is not accidental. Internal research revealed by Frances Haugen showed that algorithmic systems routinely privilege content that elicits anger or division because it drives engagement and advertising revenue. The architecture of recommendation systems rewards material that sustains emotional arousal, reinforcing cycles of outrage and counter-outrage. In this sense, rage-baiting is not simply a rhetorical strategy adopted by opportunistic actors but a rational adaptation to platform incentives. The social consequences are significant. Communities organised around implausible beliefs often display strong internal cohesion precisely because their claims provoke ridicule and hostility from outsiders. Conflict reinforces identity on all sides, while platforms benefit

[68] Ayolov, P. (2024) The Economic Policy of Online Media: Manufacture of Dissent. London: Routledge.

from the resulting traffic. Those invested in factual correction pay a structural cost, as efforts to debunk falsehoods frequently amplify them further. Anger thus operates as a form of unpaid labour, converting moral concern into monetisable engagement. The formula 'angry people click more' therefore describes more than a psychological tendency. It names a governing principle of digital capitalism. Propaganda has shifted from an ideological project aimed at belief to an infrastructural system organised around emotional extraction. As long as attention remains the primary currency of online media, anger will continue to be cultivated, circulated and sold. The central danger is not only widespread deception, but a communicative environment in which outrage is structurally rewarded and truth is economically disadvantaged.

A formal sociology of online harassment

In Katherine Cross's article[69] 'Toward a Formal Sociology of Online Harassment' (2019) online harassment is situated within the broader architecture of moral outrage networks by treating digital abuse not as individual deviance but as a structured, collective form of anger mobilisation. Cross's central contribution lies in reframing harassment as a patterned social process that unfolds through recognisable forms of interaction, rather than as the spontaneous cruelty of isolated actors. This perspective aligns directly with the core argument of this chapter: that contemporary digital environments do not merely host anger but actively organise, amplify and monetise it through networked infrastructures. Cross develops her analysis using Georg Simmel's formal sociology, which focuses on recurrent social forms independent of specific ideological content. From this angle, harassment is not defined by who participates or what beliefs they hold, but by how collective hostility is organised, legitimised and sustained. What appears as chaos or mob irrationality is revealed as a stabilised pattern of interaction that can be reproduced across platforms, fandoms and political communities. Harassment, in this sense, becomes one of the standardised formats through which moral anger circulates online. A key insight of the article is that harassment is rarely direct or spontaneous. Cross introduces the concept of second-order harassment to describe situations in which individuals attack a target only after absorbing scripts, cues and justifications circulating elsewhere. Viral hoaxes, ironic memes or moralised narratives provide ready-made language and affective framing that participants reproduce without originating themselves. Anger here is socially learned and collectively rehearsed before it is enacted. This mechanism mirrors rage-bait dynamics more broadly, where emotionally charged content trains audiences in how and whom to attack. The most analytically decisive concept in Cross's framework is third-order harassment. This refers to collective practices in which the crowd talks about the target rather than to the target. On forums, image boards and specialised harassment platforms, individuals are transformed into abstract objects of discourse: figures to be analysed, mocked, moralised or pathologised. These discussions often remain invisible to the target, yet they function as the organisational core of harassment campaigns. Threads accumulate alleged transgressions, speculative diagnoses and conspiracy narratives, blending factual material with fabrication. Crucially, they also provide links to personal profiles, workplaces and private data, a practice Cross terms target calling. With a single click, participants can move from commentary to direct abuse. Third-order harassment operates as the moral and logistical engine of collective anger. It generates justifications for hostility, distributes labour across participants and normalises extreme rhetoric, including threats of violence. While first-order harassment involves invasive acts such

[69] Cross, K. (2019) 'Toward a formal sociology of online harassment', Human Technology, 15(3), pp. 326–346.

as doxing, swatting or economic sabotage, and second-order harassment consists of direct insults or threats, third-order harassment provides the narrative and emotional infrastructure that makes these acts appear warranted or even virtuous. The three orders form an inverted pyramid converging on the victim, but they are not sequential stages. A single participant may engage in all three simultaneously, and campaigns often erupt across all levels at once. The decisive claim is that harassment is collective before it is individual. Cross illustrates this dynamic through GamerGate, which functions as a paradigmatic case of sustained moral outrage. GamerGate transformed episodic harassment into a durable climate by constructing a massive third-order infrastructure capable of sustaining attacks over months and years. The significance of gaming culture lies not in any unique pathology, but in its pre-existing links to chan-board cultures and ironic play frames that allowed cruelty to masquerade as humour or debate. Abuse could be disavowed as 'just jokes' while still producing real harm, illustrating how moral anger can be disembedded from responsibility through performative ambiguity. From the perspective of moral outrage networks, third-order harassment exemplifies how anger becomes infrastructural. Platforms do not need to instruct users to harass. They merely need to provide environments where outrage can be collectively framed, validated and redirected. Once the moral narrative is established, participation becomes frictionless. This helps explain why harassment campaigns persist even when individual perpetrators are banned or deplatformed. The form survives the removal of specific actors. The implications of this analysis extend beyond harassment narrowly defined. Cross's formal sociology reveals how digital systems reward collective anger by providing spaces where moral judgement can be rehearsed, intensified and operationalised. Interventions focused solely on punishing individual offenders fail to address the organisational layer where anger is produced and legitimised. As with rage-bait economies more broadly, the problem is not merely harmful content but the social architectures that make moral hostility easy, rewarding and scalable. Understanding harassment as a collective moral practice is therefore essential to understanding how anger functions as a governing force in contemporary digital communication.

Anger as engine for enline behavior

Dag Wollebæk, Rune Karlsen and Bernard Enjolras's article[70] 'Anger, Fear, and Echo Chambers: The Emotional Basis for Online Behavior' (2019) integrates political psychology into the analysis of moral outrage networks by showing how different negative emotions organise distinct patterns of digital engagement. The article challenges the tendency to treat echo chambers as a mechanically produced outcome of algorithms and selective exposure, arguing instead that emotional dispositions shape how people seek information, engage in debate and confront political opponents online. This distinction is central to understanding why contemporary outrage economies are powered disproportionately by anger rather than fear. The authors begin from a familiar puzzle. Digital environments are often accused of enclosing users within ideologically homogeneous echo chambers, yet empirical studies repeatedly show mixed patterns of both insulation and confrontation. Online spaces can simultaneously increase exposure to opposing views and intensify hostility. To explain this ambiguity, Wollebæk, Karlsen and Enjolras introduce emotion as a missing explanatory variable. Their theoretical anchor is affective intelligence theory, which treats emotions as rapid evaluative signals that

[70] Wollebæk, D., Karlsen, R. and Enjolras, B. (2019) 'Anger, Fear, and Echo Chambers: The Emotional Basis for Online Behavior', Social Media + Society, 5(2).

guide attention, cognition and behaviour. Within this framework, fear and anger are not interchangeable negative states but distinct orientations toward the political world. Fear is associated with uncertainty, lack of control and heightened vigilance. It tends to trigger what affective intelligence calls a surveillance mode: increased attention, information seeking and openness to new or even disconfirming evidence. Anger, by contrast, is associated with blame attribution, moral certainty and a subjective sense of control. It encourages norm defence, reliance on heuristics, reduced cognitive effort and motivated reasoning. Both emotions can be elicited by the same political stimulus and often coexist, but they push behaviour in different directions. This distinction maps neatly onto the architecture of outrage-driven platforms, where moral certainty and blame attribution are far more profitable than uncertainty and cautious inquiry. To operationalise these differences, the article separates echo chambers into two dimensions: debate and information. Debate concerns how often people discuss politics online and whether they engage with out-groups. Information concerns whether people seek confirmatory or contradictory political content. Using data from the Norwegian Citizen Panel, a probability-based survey conducted in late 2017, the authors construct indices of anger and fear directed toward general, economic and social conditions. They then examine how these emotions correlate with online discussion patterns and information-seeking behaviour, controlling for political interest, party affiliation, gender, education and age. The results complicate simplistic echo chamber narratives. Anger is positively associated with participation in online political debate. Angry users are more likely to argue about politics on social media, even after accounting for standard predictors of engagement. Crucially, anger is also positively related to discussion with out-groups, including people with opposing political views, different ethnic backgrounds and different social classes. Rather than retreating into insulated bubbles, angry users are drawn into confrontational cross-group encounters. This pattern aligns less with the image of echo chambers and more with what the authors describe as ‘trench warfare’: a public sphere characterised by constant conflict across visible lines of difference. In the information domain, however, anger behaves differently. It is associated with confirmatory information seeking: visiting like-minded party or politician websites and searching for material that reinforces existing views. Fear shows the opposite tendency. While fear is not significantly related to participation in online debate, it is associated with greater openness to contradictory information and exposure to opposing arguments. Fearful users appear more likely to seek out disconfirming material, consistent with an uncertainty-reducing orientation. The combined effect is asymmetrical. Anger fuels engagement and confrontation while simultaneously narrowing informational horizons; fear dampens debate but broadens informational exposure. From the perspective of moral outrage networks, this emotional division of labour is revealing. Anger emerges as the dominant emotional engine of online political life. It drives traffic, sustains participation and intensifies conflict, making it highly compatible with platform business models that reward engagement. Fear, by contrast, introduces friction. It encourages slower, more exploratory behaviour that does not reliably translate into clicks, shares or prolonged outrage cycles. This helps explain why outrage economies amplify anger disproportionately, even when fear may be socially adaptive in other contexts. The authors note that anger can be interpreted in a mildly optimistic light, insofar as it motivates participation and draws attention to perceived injustices. Yet the broader literature associates anger with incivility, hostility, reduced willingness to compromise and increased susceptibility to congenial misinformation. An online public sphere energised primarily by anger is therefore unlikely to support deliberation or trust. The study also acknowledges limitations: causal direction cannot be established, national context matters, and self-reported emotions have

inherent constraints. Nonetheless, the central insight remains robust. Anger and fear are not interchangeable background moods but structuring forces of digital political behaviour. For a sociology of moral outrage networks, this distinction is decisive. Outrage-driven systems do not simply reflect public emotions; they selectively reward those emotions that maximise engagement. Anger is not only more visible online because people feel it more, but because digital infrastructures are optimised to cultivate, circulate and monetise it. Fear searches; anger clicks.

Circulation of digital rage

Ryan C. Martin and Lauren E. Vieaux's chapter[71] 'The Digital Rage: How Anger is Expressed Online' (2016) follows the circulation of online anger within the broader logic of moral outrage networks by treating anger not as an incidental emotion but as a communicative practice structurally encouraged by digital environments. Rather than approaching echo chambers primarily through ideological sorting or algorithmic exposure, Martin and Vieaux focus on how anger travels, intensifies and converts into aggressive behaviour under conditions of networked interaction. Their analysis helps explain why outrage feels so natural online and why anger functions as a dominant emotional currency in contemporary digital public life. The chapter begins with a simple but consequential observation: anger is everywhere online. From social networking sites and discussion forums to email and comment sections, expressions of anger have become routine and socially normalised. Users report behaviours that range from impulsive venting to name-calling, rumour spreading, the creation of hostile pages or events, and in extreme cases unauthorised access to others' accounts to post inflammatory content. These actions are frequently followed by regret, reputational damage and fractured relationships, yet they recur with striking regularity. This persistence indicates that online anger is not merely a failure of individual self-control but a predictable outcome of the communicative conditions under which interaction takes place. A central conceptual distinction in the chapter is between anger and aggression. Anger is treated as an emotional state that can vary in intensity, while aggression is defined as behaviour intended to cause harm. The authors stress that the two are not identical: anger does not always lead to aggression, and aggression can occur without anger. However, in digital contexts the distance between the two is often shortened. The speed, visibility and reduced social friction of online communication allow anger to pass rapidly into harmful action. Understanding anger therefore becomes essential to understanding the wider ecology of online hostility that characterises outrage-driven publics. Martin and Vieaux also explain why systematic research on online anger has lagged behind its social importance. Digital populations are difficult to study because they are fluid, anonymous and resistant to traditional survey methods. Even when data can be collected, interpretation is fraught with difficulty. Written communication lacks tone of voice and facial cues, while sarcasm, irony and exaggeration complicate emotional inference. Emoticons and computational coding systems provide partial solutions, but ambiguity remains endemic. Compounding this problem is the instability of the research object itself. Platforms evolve rapidly, altering affordances for emotional expression and rendering findings provisional. The digital stage is constantly being rebuilt while emotional performances are already under way. To explain why

[71] Martin, R. C. and Vieaux, L. E. (2016) 'The Digital Rage: How Anger is Expressed Online', in The Psychology of Social Networking, Vol. 2. Warsaw: De Gruyter Open Poland.

anger flourishes online, the chapter draws on general models of anger that emphasise three interacting elements: a precipitating event, a pre-anger state and a cognitive appraisal of the event. Digital environments intensify all three. Provocations are omnipresent, arriving as an endless stream of political, moral and personal stimuli. Users often encounter this stream while tired, stressed or overstimulated, lowering emotional thresholds. Appraisal processes are sharpened by interpretive habits that read posts as blameworthy, unjust or deserving of punishment, especially when stripped of contextual cues. The chapter is careful not to pathologise anger itself. Appraisals can be accurate, and anger can be reasonable. The decisive issue is how anger is expressed and what consequences follow from its expression. The relevance of this analysis for moral outrage networks becomes clearer in the discussion of emotional virality. Martin and Vieaux summarise evidence showing that anger is unusually contagious online. Studies of large platforms indicate that angry content spreads more widely than other emotions and travels across both close and distant social ties. Joy, by contrast, tends to circulate within more intimate networks. This asymmetry matters because it allows anger to leap between groups while simultaneously hardening group boundaries. Angry content recruits strangers, escalates conflict and reinforces factional alignment, making it ideally suited to environments that reward attention and reaction. One of the most destabilising mechanisms identified in the chapter is the myth of catharsis. Many users believe that venting anger online is therapeutic. While posting may produce short-term relief, research suggests that venting often increases rumination and reinforces angry dispositions over time. Users of anonymous rant platforms, for example, report immediate calm but display higher levels of maladaptive anger in everyday life. In outrage networks, this illusion of release sustains participation. Expression is rewarded emotionally and socially, while the underlying anger cycle is strengthened rather than resolved. The chapter also identifies structural features of online communication that lower inhibitions and accelerate escalation. Anonymity or perceived anonymity reduces accountability. Social distance weakens empathy and makes harm harder to perceive. Speed enables impulsive responses at the peak of arousal, before reflection can intervene. Written interaction amplifies misunderstanding, as humour, irony and cultural reference are easily misread. Together, these features create conditions in which moral disagreement slides rapidly into personalised hostility. Viewed through the lens of moral outrage networks, Martin and Vieaux's analysis shows how anger becomes infrastructural. Digital platforms do not merely host anger; they reward its expression, amplify its circulation and convert it into visibility and engagement. Echo chambers, in this sense, are not only informational formations but affective ones, sustained by the virality of anger, the misbelief in catharsis and the ease with which momentary appraisals are transformed into public performances. Digital rage is therefore not an anomaly of online life but one of its most reliable outputs.

The Dissent Factory of Online Media

'Rage baiting' and 'anger clicking' are not marginal quirks of online culture but core mechanisms through which contemporary platform media convert moral conflict into revenue. The central claim is that online communication has been reorganised into a dissent factory: a system that systematically produces, amplifies and sells antagonism. In earlier propaganda environments the strategic goal was to stabilise a public, narrow the range of permissible views and manufacture consent. In the platform environment the more profitable outcome is not unity but continual agitation. Dissent is no longer an obstacle to be contained but a resource to be cultivated. The cultural consolidation of 'rage bait' as a widely recognised category of content

signals that this shift has become visible even at the level of everyday language. Rage bait names a design logic: content engineered to provoke anger, discord and moral escalation in order to generate engagement. Unlike clickbait, which primarily trades on curiosity, rage bait trades on indignation. Its effectiveness depends on a simple behavioural regularity: high-arousal emotions increase interaction. Anger encourages rapid response, moral condemnation, sharing, quote-posting and comment wars. Each of these actions generates measurable signals that ranking algorithms treat as evidence of relevance. In an attention economy where visibility is allocated by engagement, anger becomes an upgrade to distribution. The expression 'anger clicking' illustrates how the same term can have two lives, one technical and one political-economic. At the micro level of user experience analytics, 'anger clicks' refer to rapid repeated clicking on an unresponsive interface element. Frustration here is interpreted as friction, a problem to be corrected because it can reduce conversions. At the macro level of platform economics, however, frustration and outrage cease to be mere costs. They become signals of intensity, and intensity correlates with time-on-site, return visits and dense interaction. What is harmful to a checkout flow can be profitable to a content feed. This inversion clarifies the deeper logic of platform design: the system is not optimised for calm comprehension but for sustained attention, and anger is one of the most efficient fuels for that attention. This is where the transformed propaganda model becomes legible. The five filters described by Herman and Chomsky did not disappear; they were reconfigured. Ownership becomes platform ownership, which controls the conditions of visibility. Advertising becomes behavioural targeting, dependent on data extraction and engagement metrics. Sourcing shifts toward user-generated content, influencers and viral fragments, whose prominence is shaped less by editorial judgement than by algorithmic ranking. Flak becomes networked, as outrage storms, coordinated reporting and harassment campaigns punish targets at scale. The organising ideology becomes flexible and rotating, replacing a single cold-war enemy with an endless sequence of polarising targets. In such a system, rage bait is not a deviation from rational communication but a rational adaptation to the incentives created by these filters. Three analytical frames help triangulate the system. Christian Fuchs's work[72] on Propaganda 2.0 foregrounds the political economy of platforms, emphasising digital labour and the audience commodity. Users produce data and content that is monetised by platform capital, and the platform's primary power lies in infrastructural control. Tobias Rose-Stockwell's analysis[73] of the outrage machine approaches the same environment through design and optimisation, showing how engagement metrics and continuous experimentation gradually favour emotionally charged content. Ayolov's 'manufacture of dissent model connects these strands by specifying anger as the pivotal resource. In this view, the principle that angry people click more operates as an unwritten economic policy. It is not merely that outrage happens online; it is that online systems are structured to reward it, and media actors adapt by producing it more deliberately. The Social Dilemma (2020) film offers a popularised but useful illustration of this architecture from the inside. Former employees describe business models built around engagement, retention and behavioural prediction, where design choices are evaluated according to their ability to increase interaction. Under such optimisation, divisive and inflammatory content is repeatedly selected because it produces strong measurable reactions.

[72] Fuchs, C. (2019) 'Propaganda 2.0: Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in the Age of the Internet, Big Data and Social Media', in Pedro-Carañana, J., Broudy, D. and Klaehn, J. (eds) The Propaganda Model Today. London: University of Westminster Press.

[73] Rose-Stockwell, T. (2023) Outrage Machine: How Tech Amplifies Discontent, Disrupts Democracy – And What We Can Do About It. New York: Legacy Lit.

Even when platforms declare neutrality, the practical effect of engagement-based ranking is to privilege content that triggers moral arousal. Rage bait thus functions as the content form most compatible with the optimisation function. The consequence is a permanent symbolic conflict, a 'cold war online' in which words and images operate as weapons in continuous micro-battles between factions. Each controversy generates an explosion of engagement that is converted into advertising value, subscriptions, donations or data profiles. Conflict does not need to be resolved; it needs to be renewed. Public life becomes an economy of words in which moral injury and political hostility are constantly manufactured, circulated and monetised. The costs are social and democratic: erosion of trust, fragmentation of publics and the replacement of deliberation with performative indignation. Yet from the standpoint of platform profitability the system is efficient. It turns outrage into surplus value. The chapter's conclusion follows directly. Rage baiting and anger clicking should be analysed not as a decline in manners but as an institutional logic of communication. The platform public sphere is economically anchored in emotional extraction, and anger is its most reliable extract. Any attempt to address the problem that does not confront these incentives will treat symptoms while preserving the dissent factory that produces them.

The Monetisation of Anger

The contemporary digital media have transformed propaganda from a system oriented toward ideological consensus into a system organised around the monetisation of anger and the systematic production of dissent. The shift does not represent a breakdown of media power but its reconfiguration under conditions of platform capitalism, where emotional intensity has become the primary driver of visibility, engagement and profit. In this new configuration, anger is no longer a disruptive by-product of political communication but a managed resource embedded in the economic logic of online media. Herman and Chomsky's original propaganda model described mass media as a consensus-generating machine. Through five structural filters—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak and a dominant ideological frame—mainstream media narrowed the range of acceptable discourse and aligned public perception with elite interests. The model presupposed a relatively unified media environment, dominated by a limited number of institutional gatekeepers, where stability and predictability were economically rational outcomes. Consensus was not merely ideological; it was functional. It reduced uncertainty, protected advertising markets and sustained institutional legitimacy. The digital media environment reverses these incentives. As Ayolov argues, online platforms do not require consensus to remain profitable. On the contrary, fragmentation, polarisation and conflict generate more interaction, more data and more advertising value. Engagement replaces information as the primary commodity. The audience is no longer addressed as a mass public but divided into algorithmically sorted micro-publics, each fed emotionally resonant content calibrated to maximise reaction. In this setting, dissent becomes economically productive. Political disagreement, moral outrage and symbolic conflict are not costs to be managed but outputs to be cultivated. This transformation is captured in what can be described as Propaganda 2.0. The classical filters persist but operate differently. Ownership shifts from media corporations to platform monopolies that control algorithmic visibility. Advertising evolves into behavioural targeting, rewarding content that provokes strong emotional responses. Sourcing becomes decentralised, privileging viral user-generated material over institutional journalism. Flak is no longer limited to elite pressure but takes the form of networked outrage, harassment and coordinated reporting. Ideology loses its unifying function and is replaced by

perpetual culture-war polarisation, where enemies are endlessly rotated to sustain attention. The system no longer seeks to stabilise meaning but to keep conflict in circulation. At the centre of this model lies the principle that angry people click more. Anger is a high-arousal emotion that predicts commenting, sharing, quote-posting and prolonged engagement. Algorithms trained to maximise interaction learn to prioritise content that triggers moral indignation, blame and hostility. Rage-baiting and anger-clicking are not aberrations but operational expressions of this logic. Rage-bait refers to the deliberate production of content designed to provoke anger rather than inform, exploiting the fact that outrage reliably generates engagement signals. Anger-clicking describes both the behavioural trace of frustration and the economic mechanism by which emotional arousal is converted into measurable value. Comparative perspectives clarify the structure of this system. Christian Fuchs extends[74] the propaganda model into the digital age by analysing platform capitalism and digital labour, showing how users' emotional and communicative activity is commodified. Tobias Rose-Stockwell examines how engagement-driven design decisions gradually favour outrage, not through conspiracy but through optimisation. Ayolov integrates these insights into a political-economic framework that foregrounds anger as the decisive variable. In this synthesis, the manufacture of dissent is not a rhetorical metaphor but a structural description of how platforms generate profit by organising public life around antagonism. Whistleblower testimony reinforces this analysis. Frances Haugen's disclosures[75] demonstrated that major platforms were aware that divisive and anger-inducing content increased engagement and retention, yet continued to amplify it because it aligned with revenue objectives. The management of anger thus becomes a form of governance. Platforms do not simply allow outrage; they modulate its intensity, visibility and circulation in ways that optimise economic return. Users adapt to these incentives by expressing more extreme emotions, learning which forms of anger are rewarded with reach and recognition. The consequence is a permanent state of symbolic conflict, a civil cold war conducted through language, images and moral accusations. Unlike classical propaganda, which sought to close debate, Propaganda 2.0 thrives on keeping it open but inflamed. Dissent is no longer a sign of democratic vitality or resistance but a raw material processed by algorithms into attention and profit. Anger becomes the central category of communication, not because it is always justified, but because it is economically efficient. Understanding this transformation requires abandoning the assumption that digital media malfunction when they amplify outrage. They function as designed. Any critical response that focuses solely on content moderation, fact-checking or individual restraint fails to address the underlying incentives. As long as engagement-based revenue structures reward emotional escalation, the monetisation of anger will remain the organising principle of online communication. Propaganda 2.0 is not a temporary phase but a stable configuration of media power in the age of platform capitalism.

The Cassandra Warning

Drawing on Molly J. Crockett's article 'Moral outrage in the digital age' (2017) and Peter Ayolov's The Economic Policy of Online Media: Manufacture of Dissent (2024), this section argues that the contemporary shift from moral outrage to rage-bait is not an accidental cultural fad but a predictable outcome of platform capitalism, where anger is treated as an extractable

[74] Fuchs, C. (2018). 'Propaganda 2.0: Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in the Age of the Internet, Big Data, and Social Media'. International Journal of Communication.
[75] Haugen, F. (2021). Testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

resource and dissent becomes a monetisable product. Crockett's intervention now reads as a Cassandra warning: empirically precise, widely cited, and yet absorbed by the very systems whose incentives ensured that the identified harms would deepen. The core of her claim was straightforward. Digital media lower the cost of expressing outrage, increase its visibility, and reward it with measurable approval signals. When a moral judgement can be issued as a click, a share, a quote-post, or a pile-on comment, outrage becomes frictionless. When a judgement is broadcast beyond its original context, it gains a scale once reserved for mass-media institutions. When platforms translate outrage into likes, shares and visibility, they convert moral emotion into behavioural reinforcement. The key implication is not that outrage is new, but that its ecology has changed: the conditions of expression are engineered to privilege rapid condemnation over deliberation, and the feedback loops train users to repeat what the system rewards. Subsequent research published in the early 2020s has strengthened the Cassandra quality of this argument by clarifying how outrage becomes both misperceived and strategically produced. Outrage is not simply amplified; it is also inflated as a perceived norm. Users routinely encounter the most emotionally intense content because ranking systems favour engagement, and this produces a distorted impression that anger is everywhere, that hostility is the default, and that moral escalation is socially expected. In such an environment, moderate disagreement is easily interpreted as aggression, while extreme moral language appears ordinary. The result is an affective public sphere in which people do not merely express anger but anticipate it, and begin to perform it pre-emptively as a signal of group loyalty and moral seriousness. This is the pivot point where moral outrage, originally tied to norm enforcement, becomes detached from proportionality, evidence and accountability. Outrage becomes a style of participation. The transition to rage-bait marks the industrialisation of this emotional logic. Rage-bait is not merely provocative content; it is provocation designed for the metrics that govern distribution. Its purpose is to trigger indignation reliably, because indignation produces the visible reactions that algorithms treat as success. Rage-farming extends this logic by cultivating the anger of targets and opponents, turning their responses into further amplification. The offended user becomes a distributor, the critic becomes free labour, and denunciation becomes a mechanism of circulation. This is why rage-bait thrives even when it is obviously implausible. A claim does not need to be credible in order to be profitable; it needs to be insulting to common sense, identity, or morality in a way that compels reaction. In this sense, the economy of outrage does not depend on persuasion but on activation. The most effective content is content that makes people feel forced to respond. Here the argument joins the manufacture of dissent thesis. Classical propaganda systems aimed at stabilising belief through narrowing discourse and suppressing dissent. The contemporary platform environment can profit without ideological unity. It profits from fragmentation, antagonism and ceaseless argument, because the measurable outputs of conflict are precisely what feeds the attention economy. Dissent becomes a product. Users are positioned not as recipients of narratives but as producers of engagement, recruited into cycles of accusation, rebuttal, ridicule and escalation. The public sphere becomes less a space of deliberation than a theatre of moral performance, where visibility is won through intensity and the most reliable shortcut to intensity is anger. The Cassandra metaphor matters because it identifies why warnings alone fail. A system organised around emotional extraction is not corrected by diagnosis, because the diagnosis does not change the incentive structure. When outrage generates engagement and engagement generates revenue, outrage becomes a rational output of the system. This is why rage-bait is best understood as policy rather than pathology: it expresses the economic logic of platforms that monetise attention by privileging high-arousal emotions. Under these conditions,

moral outrage is transformed from an episodic response to norm violation into a continuous resource stream, and rage-bait becomes the refined product that keeps the stream flowing. The chapter's central claim follows directly. The problem is not only that digital spaces contain more anger, but that they organise social life around anger as a default mode of participation, ensuring that the manufacture of dissent is reproduced daily as an ordinary feature of the digital public sphere.

4.2. Outrage Exploitation Networks

Outrage industrial complex

'The Outrage-Industrial Complex' is a set[76] of outrage exploitation networks that operate as a core subsystem within the contemporary manufacture of dissent. The complex fuses media organisations, social media performers, political fundraising machinery, and public figures who survive by constantly naming, inflating, and circulating 'outrages'. Its aim is not clarification but ignition: to produce a permanent state of moral anger, a feeling of righteous fury grounded in frustration and impotence, which can be harvested for clicks, donations, status, and influence. In its more corrosive forms, this outrage is not merely monetised but weaponised, deliberately intensifying social antagonism and accelerating political and cultural fragmentation within a society. Rather than treating outrage as a spontaneous or pathological feature of public life, these networks reveal how anger is systematically produced, circulated and monetised by a loosely coordinated constellation of media outlets, platform infrastructures, influencers, political entrepreneurs and fundraising operations. Outrage is no longer merely expressed; it is engineered, managed and extracted as a renewable resource within the attention economy. At the centre of outrage exploitation networks lies a simple but powerful logic: highly emotional content generates more engagement than neutral or analytical communication. Anger, disgust and moral indignation reliably trigger commenting, sharing, quote-posting and retaliatory responses, all of which produce measurable signals valued by platforms and advertisers. The outrage industrial complex names the convergence of actors who exploit this logic for fame, revenue, political mobilisation or strategic destabilisation. These actors need not share ideology or coordinate explicitly. What binds them is an incentive structure that rewards provocation and penalises moderation. Historically, the production of outrage is not new. Political polemic, scandal journalism and moral crusades have long existed. What distinguishes contemporary outrage exploitation networks is scale, speed and automation. Digital platforms collapse audiences, allowing a single provocation to reach millions instantaneously. Algorithms trained to maximise engagement amplify content that elicits strong reactions, creating a feedback loop in which outrage becomes increasingly visible and increasingly normalised. Users encountering these environments infer that anger is the dominant emotional register of public life and adapt their own expression accordingly. Outrage exploitation networks operate through a division of labour. Some actors specialise in identifying controversial topics that reliably activate in-group and out-group dynamics. Others package these topics into emotionally charged narratives designed to provoke righteous indignation. Influencers and partisan media then frame responses as moral imperatives, encouraging audiences to react publicly. Political fundraisers convert outrage into donations, while platforms convert the resulting activity into advertising revenue and behavioural data. The network functions without a central command, coordinated instead

[76] Ford, Richard Thompson (2019-12-20). "The Outrage-Industrial Complex". The American Interest. Retrieved 2024-06-17.

by metrics, incentives and algorithmic visibility. Psychologically, these networks exploit well-documented tendencies. Perceived injustice toward one's in-group activates reward and habit systems in the brain, producing a cycle that resembles addiction. Retaliation and condemnation offer short-term relief and affirmation, encouraging repeated engagement. Outrage thus becomes self-reinforcing, not because it resolves conflict, but because it temporarily satisfies emotional needs while deepening antagonism. The culture of contempt described in journalistic and psychological accounts emerges as a predictable outcome of this cycle. Opponents are framed not merely as wrong, but as morally deficient or dangerous, legitimising ever harsher rhetoric. A critical feature of outrage exploitation networks is their ability to distort perceptions of public opinion. Although only a small minority of users generate the most extreme content, algorithmic amplification creates the illusion that such expressions are widespread. This 'paradox of virality' leads audiences to overestimate the prevalence and intensity of anger in society. Moderation appears naïve, while escalation appears realistic. In this way, outrage networks manufacture not only conflict but the perception that conflict is unavoidable. Economic incentives reinforce this distortion. Advertising effectiveness correlates strongly with loud, polarising content. Political actors learn that outrage is an efficient tool for mobilisation and fundraising, while media outlets discover that indignation increases page views and loyalty. In some cases, outrage content is managed transnationally, with actors outside the target society posing as local voices to exploit cultural fault lines. The industrial logic remains the same regardless of geography: provoke, polarise, monetise. Algorithms play a decisive role in stabilising these networks. Engagement-based ranking systems privilege incendiary content because it generates interaction. Recommendation systems tend to lead users toward more extreme material, gradually intensifying exposure and emotional response. These 'hate-inducing architectures' do not require malicious intent; they emerge from optimisation functions that treat engagement as success. Outrage exploitation networks flourish because platform infrastructures are structurally aligned with their goals. Within the broader framework of Propaganda 2.0, outrage exploitation networks represent a shift from persuasion to activation. The objective is not to convince opponents but to keep audiences emotionally mobilised. Dissent becomes a permanent condition, not a transitional phase. The system thrives on unresolved conflict, converting each controversy into a new cycle of engagement. In this sense, outrage functions as the raw material of the digital public sphere, continuously processed into attention, data and revenue. The social costs are substantial. Persistent exposure to outrage erodes trust in institutions, intensifies polarisation and reduces the capacity for constructive dialogue. Yet from an economic standpoint, the system is efficient. It externalises emotional labour to users while internalising profit. Outrage exploitation networks thus exemplify the mature form of the outrage industrial complex: a decentralised but highly effective mechanism for transforming moral anger into value.

Criminal Outrage Exploitation

Tanya Mehra and Menso Hartgers's ICCT policy brief[77] Fury and Void: Legal Pathways to Counter 764 (2025) clarifies how outrage exploitation networks can move beyond profitable polarisation into coercive, criminal systems that treat public disgust as both camouflage and currency. In the everyday attention economy, outrage is manufactured to extend sessions,

[77] Mehra, T. and Hartgers, M. (2025) Fury and Void: Legal Pathways to Counter 764, ICCT Policy Brief, October, DOI: 10.19165/JPMK6116.

intensify engagement, and convert emotional arousal into advertising value, data extraction, and reputational capital. In the severe end of the spectrum, however, outrage becomes a tactical instrument for networks that operate at the intersection of violent extremism, child sexual exploitation, and sadistic online cruelty, using the public's horror not as an unintended side effect but as an operational environment. The key analytical step is to treat outrage not simply as content but as infrastructure: a predictable chain of provocation, circulation, amplification, and secondary harm, running through platform affordances, anonymous or encrypted channels, and the cultural habit of sharing 'shocking' material as a form of moral performance. This chapter's concern is not the sensational detail of any single case, but the structural logic by which criminal actors weaponise the same dynamics that sustain mainstream rage-baiting: speed, reach, emotional escalation, and the conversion of attention into measurable reward. The 764 network is presented as a transnational, decentralised ecosystem that targets vulnerable youth online through grooming, coercion, and intimidation, and then uses the resulting harm and violent spectacle to generate further shock, fear, and notoriety. Outrage here functions in two directions at once. First, it is used internally as a prestige economy: status is earned through the production of extreme content and the demonstration of cruelty, producing a competitive spiral in which transgression becomes the only recognised signal of belonging. Second, it is used externally as a social technology: the circulation of shocking material is designed to destabilise, to intimidate, and to pull bystanders into a theatre of disgust that spreads faster than any correction, investigation, or institutional response. Such networks reveal a bleak continuity between the commercial and the criminal. Platforms reward high-arousal reactions; audiences often cannot resist responding; the resulting engagement trains recommender systems to deliver more of the same; and a minority of highly motivated actors learn to shape that feedback loop with increasing precision. Outrage exploitation networks therefore operate as parasitic systems living off a public attention architecture that privileges emotional intensity over verification, context, or proportionality. A further complication is ideological ambiguity. The brief notes that 764 sits in a zone where nihilistic aesthetics, pseudo-occult symbolism, and occasional intersections with accelerationist or neo-Nazi milieus can coexist without a stable doctrinal core. This matters because much counter-extremism law and practice assumes recognisable ideological motive, while these networks may be driven by 'vibes over ideology': misanthropy, dominance, notoriety, and thrill-seeking amplified by online subcultural status games. The result is a legal and institutional problem that mirrors the sociological one. Traditional categories such as terrorism, hate crime, or organised crime each capture part of the phenomenon, yet none fully describes how digital cruelty can be organised through dispersed micro-cells, encrypted platforms, and shifting identities, with minors appearing as both victims and coerced participants. The brief's emphasis on investigations and prosecutions highlights how attribution becomes difficult when the same ecosystem mixes different forms of harmful content, when recruitment happens in gaming-adjacent spaces, and when evidence is fragmented across jurisdictions, platforms, and devices. Outrage itself complicates the work further by encouraging viral circulation of harmful material, by prompting moral panics that demand immediate symbolic action, and by creating pressure for heavy-handed responses that may weaken rights protections and erode public trust. Outrage exploitation networks therefore name a specific convergence: the attention economy's preference for provocation meets a criminal ecology that thrives on coercion, spectacle, and transnational friction. The policy lesson is that 'anger management' in digital life cannot be reduced to individual self-control or generic media literacy. Structural responses become necessary because the system's incentives are misaligned with public safety. The brief points towards coordination between law

enforcement units, clearer distinctions between illegal and harmful content, procedural safeguards in online investigations, and serious consideration of how legal frameworks define terrorism, organisation, and motive. For this chapter, the broader theoretical implication is that propaganda in the platform age is not only about messaging or persuasion. It is also about the engineering of emotional climates in which outrage becomes the default mode of attention and the easiest pathway to mobilisation, profit, and harm. Once outrage is treated as an extractable resource, both corporate and criminal actors can exploit it; the difference is not the mechanism but the extremity of the ends.

Radical Communities of Hate

Anton Törnberg and Petter Törnberg's study[78] 'Intimate Communities of Hate: Why Social Media Fuels Far-Right Extremism' examines how digital platforms have transformed far-right radicalisation from an organisational project into an emotional and communal process structured by language, ritual, and affect rather than doctrine or formal hierarchy. Their point of departure is the long-running white supremacist forum Stormfront, which emerged in the late 1990s and rapidly became one of the most influential extremist spaces online, not despite but because of its durability across successive technological eras. While platforms, interfaces, and media fashions shifted, Stormfront persisted as a stable emotional home, demonstrating that extremist digital communities function less as information hubs and more as social environments capable of sustaining identity, memory, and belonging over time. The rise of Stormfront coincided with an early period of technological optimism, when the internet was widely imagined as a force of democratic expansion, openness, and emancipation. By removing editorial gatekeepers and enabling participation without institutional mediation, digital communication was expected to broaden the public sphere and weaken entrenched power structures. Yet the same affordances that promised pluralism also enabled the consolidation of tightly bound ideological communities, particularly among actors marginalised or delegitimised in mainstream discourse. As far-right movements gained momentum in the early twenty-first century, online platforms offered not only visibility but shelter, allowing extremist identities to be rehearsed, normalised, and intensified beyond the reach of conventional social sanctions. What distinguishes contemporary far-right extremism, however, is not merely its presence online but the degree to which social media has become constitutive of the radicalisation process itself. Platforms are not neutral tools used by extremist actors; they shape how extremism is experienced, communicated, and reproduced. Social media facilitates recruitment, coordination, and mobilisation, but more importantly it functions as a space of emotional socialisation, where shared grievances are converted into shared identities. Participation in these environments involves learning how to feel correctly: whom to hate, what to mock, when to express outrage, and how to interpret events through a collective lens of hostility and resentment. This perspective challenges older models of radicalisation that treated extremism as something imposed on individuals through ideology, propaganda, or socio-economic deprivation. Instead, radicalisation appears as a relational process, produced through interaction, repetition, and mutual recognition. Individuals do not simply adopt extremist beliefs; they are gradually inducted into communities where language, humour, symbols, and emotional responses signal belonging. In these spaces, memes, slogans, in-jokes, and recurring

[78] Törnberg, A. and Törnberg, P. (2022) 'Intimate communities of hate: Why social media fuels far-right extremism', European Journal of Social Theory, 25(3), pp. 413–432.

narratives function as markers of status and loyalty, transforming discourse into a form of social glue. Radicalisation thus unfolds primarily through linguistic and affective processes rather than formal instruction or doctrinal training. Digital environments have also decentralised extremist movements, eroding clear leadership structures and replacing top-down ideological framing with fragmented, user-driven meaning production. Rather than receiving a coherent worldview from recognised leaders, participants assemble their political identities from circulating narratives, grievances, and symbolic cues. This fragmentation increases volatility. Without organisational discipline or strategic restraint, extremist discourse becomes more performative, competitive, and emotionally escalatory, rewarding provocation over coherence and outrage over persuasion. These dynamics complicate the widely used concept of 'echo chambers'. While extremist communities are often portrayed as isolated spaces of homogeneous agreement, empirical evidence suggests that far-right online actors frequently engage with opposing viewpoints, mainstream media, and adversarial content. Such engagement does not moderate beliefs; it intensifies them. Conflict, not isolation, sustains these communities. Opposing arguments are not excluded but repurposed as objects of ridicule, proof of persecution, or justification for further hostility. What circulates within these spaces is less the repetition of shared beliefs than the continuous antagonistic interpretation of external voices. Attempts to counter radicalisation by increasing exposure to alternative perspectives often backfire, reinforcing identity boundaries and deepening emotional investment in the group. Encounters with disagreement are experienced not as deliberation but as attack, triggering defensive solidarity and moral outrage. The result is a form of stochastic radicalisation, where sustained exposure to emotionally charged discourse increases the likelihood of unpredictable acts of violence by loosely affiliated individuals, even in the absence of direct coordination. Within this framework, social media extremism should be understood not as a failure of rational debate but as a success of community formation. These platforms excel at producing intimate spaces of shared feeling, where anger, humiliation, and resentment are continuously validated and intensified. Far-right radicalisation thrives not because participants are cut off from society, but because digital infrastructures enable the creation of emotionally saturated micro-societies organised around exclusion, hostility, and the pleasures of collective antagonism. Understanding outrage exploitation networks therefore requires shifting attention away from opinions and arguments toward the emotional economies and communal rituals through which hate becomes meaningful, sustainable, and, ultimately, mobilisable.

Anger and social mechanics

Anton Törnberg and Petter Törnberg's article 'From Rationality to Rituals: A Social Theory of Online Politics' provides a crucial point of departure for understanding how contemporary digital politics, and especially extremist politics, operate less through argument and persuasion than through ritualised language, emotional synchronisation, and communal performance. Immersion in long-running online spaces such as Stormfront reveals that what appears on the surface as political discussion is rarely oriented toward convincing an opponent or establishing factual coherence. Instead, discourse functions symbolically, marking belonging, reaffirming shared hostility, and displaying competence within an internally coherent but externally antagonistic linguistic universe. Within such spaces, statements are not evaluated primarily by their truth value but by their resonance with the collective identity of the group. Threads become arenas for demonstrating loyalty, familiarity with shared myths, and fluency in the community's

idiom of hate. Language operates as a boundary-making device, continuously distinguishing ‘us’ from ‘them’, while repetitive narratives, memes, and references to earlier discussions weave a dense web of collective memory. Participation is therefore less about contributing new information than about sustaining emotional continuity and reaffirming group cohesion through recognisable forms of expression. This observation exposes the limits of classical models of political deliberation inherited from Enlightenment traditions and liberal theories of the public sphere. Those models assume politics to be driven by rational debate, argument exchange, and the gradual refinement of opinion. Yet the communicative practices observed in digital extremist communities resist such assumptions. What takes place resembles not deliberation but ritual. To grasp this dynamic, Törnberg and Törnberg turn to Émile Durkheim’s sociology of ritual and collective effervescence, originally developed to explain how pre-modern societies generated solidarity through shared symbolic practices. Durkheim’s insight was that communal rituals do not merely express social bonds but actively produce them. Through repetitive, emotionally charged gatherings, communities generate shared meanings, identities, and moral boundaries. Symbols become saturated with collective significance, standing in for the group itself. Applied to digital environments, this framework reveals how online platforms function as ritual spaces where symbolic interaction substitutes for physical co-presence. Digital discourse, far from being disembodied, becomes a site of emotional attunement, producing solidarity through rhythm, repetition, and shared affect. Language is central to this process. As later theorists of narrative identity have shown, people make sense of themselves through the stories and symbolic resources available within their communities. Adopting a community’s language entails adopting its moral universe. Jargon, slogans, and recurring narratives do not merely describe the world; they structure perception, emotion, and identity. Through linguistic participation, individuals gradually align their self-understanding with the collective story, creating a sense of coherence, purpose, and belonging that can be difficult to relinquish. Emotions are not incidental to this process but foundational. Ritualised discourse allows communities to process fear, resentment, humiliation, and anger, converting diffuse grievances into morally charged narratives. These emotions bind participants together and motivate action. When the stories that sustain collective identity are challenged, the resulting experience is often perceived as an existential threat rather than a cognitive disagreement. Defensive reactions, outrage, and hostility thus emerge not as failures of reason but as predictable responses to perceived attacks on communal meaning. This perspective has significant implications for understanding political conflict and violence online. It suggests that solidarity and antagonism are not opposing forces but mutually reinforcing processes. Strong in-group cohesion intensifies hostility toward outsiders, while external conflict strengthens internal bonds. Moral polarisation follows naturally: the in-group is imagined as virtuous, the out-group as irredeemably corrupt. Under such conditions, violence can be reframed as morally justified, even necessary, because it appears to defend the sacred core of the community. Viewed through this lens, platforms such as Stormfront resemble digital campfires rather than echo chambers. What sustains these spaces is not isolation from opposing views but continuous, emotionally charged engagement with them. Opponents are invoked, mocked, and reinterpreted in ways that reaffirm group identity. Words matter less for their propositional content than for their performative function. As in ritual chanting, meaning lies in participation itself, in the shared experience of repetition and presence. For a sociology of moral outrage and digital anger, this shift from rationality to ritual is decisive. Online politics increasingly unfolds not as a contest of ideas but as an economy of affect, where language serves to synchronise emotions, manufacture belonging, and stabilise communities organised around exclusion and hostility.

Understanding outrage exploitation networks therefore requires abandoning purely cognitive models of persuasion and focusing instead on the ritualised linguistic practices through which anger becomes communal, durable, and politically mobilisable.

Architecture of Radical Belonging

From identity to discourse to emotional energy, outrage exploitation networks transform scattered individuals into cohesive communities by converting shared grievances into symbolic language, ritualised interaction, and sustained affective intensity. Anton Törnberg and Petter Törnberg's analysis of online extremism shows that the decisive engine of digital politics is not rational persuasion but a three-part social mechanism in which identity, discourse, and emotional energy lock together to produce durable communities of antagonism and action. Identity comes first as a promise of belonging: a person enters an online space with a curiosity, a grievance, or a diffuse resentment, and finds a ready-made social mirror in which the self can be recognised and sharpened. Digital environments excel at converting thin interests into thick identities because they offer constant contact, fast feedback, and a feeling of being surrounded by like-minded strangers. Over time, social ties reorganise around the group, and the group begins to feel more real than the wider world. Politics then stops looking like disagreement over policies and starts behaving like team loyalty, where victory and defeat matter more than truth, and where the opposing side is experienced as a contaminant rather than a rival. In this identity-centred mode, participation is motivated less by programmes than by attachment, status, and an urge to avoid losing face. Out-group aversion becomes the glue of the in-group, and issue positions mutate into badges, tests, and shibboleths of membership. Discourse is the workshop where that identity is manufactured and maintained. Words and stories do not merely express belonging; they actively produce it by drawing boundaries, distributing prestige, and providing a shared way of seeing. A community's idiom becomes a kind of linguistic capital: it marks insiders, humiliates outsiders, and rewards those who speak fluently in the group's internal code. The forum thread, the meme, the in-joke, the slogan, the recycled anecdote, and the ritualised insult operate as social signals more than informational claims. What looks like 'debate' often functions as performance: proving allegiance, demonstrating knowledge of the archive, repeating the approved narrative with the correct inflection, and displaying hostility in ways that invite recognition. This is why the common story about 'echo chambers' misfires. Many hostile communities are not isolated from opposing views; they actively hunt them, quote them, and drag them back into the group as trophies. The enemy's words become raw material for ridicule and moral theatre, and cross-group contact turns into 'trench warfare' rather than deliberation. Exposure to contradiction does not automatically dissolve the group's worldview because the worldview is not built primarily by reasoning; it is built by a collective interpretive practice in which what counts as evidence is filtered through what the tribe needs to be true. Emotional energy is the fuel that makes identity and discourse stick. Durkheim's insight about ritual applies cleanly online: repeated interaction, shared focus, and barriers to outsiders generate a distinctive mood that participants experience as warmth, confidence, and moral clarity. In digital spaces organised around outrage, that mood is often high-arousal anger mixed with disgust, fear, and triumphant contempt. When a political event is felt as a threat to the group's self-story, it can function as a moral shock that drives people toward communal processing. The platform then becomes an emotional refuge where distress is converted into moral certainty through shared narration. The work is not only to interpret what happened but to transform how it feels: anxiety becomes indignation; humiliation becomes righteousness; confusion becomes blame. This ritualised conversion produces a sense of solidarity that can be

intoxicating, because it offers both a diagnosis of evil and a promise of belonging. Outrage exploitation networks thrive precisely here: they feed the group a steady supply of symbolic provocations and identity threats, keeping the emotional temperature high enough to sustain attention, loyalty, and readiness for action. In such conditions, conflict is not a breakdown of solidarity but its method, because external enemies intensify internal unity, and internal unity demands enemies to justify itself.

The Outrage Business

Jeffrey M. Berry[79] and Sarah Sobieraj's 'The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility' frames outrage not as a mere ideological style but as a commercial strategy, in which the real rivalry is less left versus right than attention versus attention, with advertising revenue as the prize. In the political media marketplace, outrage is not an accident that occasionally leaks into discourse; it is a repeatable product form that can be manufactured daily because it reliably delivers audiences. That is why outrage exploitation networks should be treated as an economic system of emotional extraction. Their defining logic is simple: indignation keeps people watching, listening, scrolling, clicking, and donating, and those behaviours become the currency that sustains the entire apparatus. Outrage thrives because competitive media environments demand differentiation. When content is abundant and switching costs are near zero, every outlet faces the same pressure: stand out or disappear. Political opinion media solves this problem by building strong, legible brands that promise a consistent emotional experience. Viewers learn what a channel, show, or platform 'feels' like before they learn what it claims. In that sense, brand identity is not merely a marketing layer sitting on top of politics; it is a political identity factory. It trains audiences to adopt a stance, a tone, and a tribal posture. The style becomes the message. Outrage is portable precisely because it can be packaged as a mood and a moral theatre that followers can inhabit, not simply as information they can evaluate. This commercial logic reshapes political identity into a consumer identity. Media audiences are assembled as loyal publics who return not primarily for argument but for emotional confirmation and group belonging. The political opponent is not treated as a rival with alternative priorities but as an enemy who must be mocked, exposed, and punished. This is where outrage exploitation networks fuse identity and discourse. Their language is engineered to signal membership, sharpen boundaries, and preserve attention through constant provocation. The predictable daily cycle of denunciation becomes a ritual, offering a shared script that tells audiences who is good, who is evil, and what must be felt today. Politics then moves from deliberation to performance, from persuasion to mobilisation, from disagreement to moral spectacle. Outrage also fits the practical constraints of contemporary media production. It is fast, cheap, and endlessly renewable. A host, a microphone, a few headlines, and a steady supply of targets are enough to produce hours of compelling content. The system does not require deep research or careful analysis; it rewards speed, repetition, and emotional escalation. The same stories can be recycled through slightly altered framings, each iteration designed to intensify rather than clarify. Outrage becomes a low-cost substitute for knowledge, and incivility becomes a shortcut to visibility. In a crowded marketplace, moderation is boring, ambiguity is risky, and nuance is unactionable. The incentives point toward sharper language, stronger accusations, and more spectacular moral

[79] Berry, J.M. and Sobieraj, S. (2011) The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

claims. The economic engine behind this system is audience delivery. Advertising follows attention, and attention follows emotional arousal. Outrage, fear, humiliation, and contempt are not merely side effects of political communication; they are the mechanism through which engagement is produced and measured. This is why outrage exploitation networks tend to drift toward ever more intense content: the market punishes calm and rewards heat. When one outlet escalates, competitors mimic the style to avoid losing audience share, producing a competitive spiral of incivility. Over time, the system normalises verbal aggression and treats rhetorical cruelty as authenticity, courage, or 'telling it like it is'. The tone hardens, the targets multiply, and the social costs are externalised onto the public sphere. In this environment, personalities become the key units of production. The most valuable asset is not a coherent ideology but a recognisable voice that can be trusted by a loyal audience. The host becomes a brand, and the brand becomes a community. Followers come to identify with the host's indignation as if it were their own moral clarity. This makes outrage unusually sticky: it is not only consumed, it is shared as proof of belonging. The same commercial system encourages cross-platform expansion, where outrage is repackaged into books, merchandise, live events, subscriptions, and fundraising appeals. Each extension reinforces the same emotional economy: the promise that loyalty will be rewarded with insider truth, and that the enemy will be named again tomorrow. The outcome is a shift from politics as rational contestation to politics as ritualised emotional production. Outrage exploitation networks do not merely report conflict; they manufacture the conditions under which conflict feels necessary, virtuous, and permanent. They generate communities by organising identity through discourse and sustaining discourse through emotional energy. In that sense, the new incivility is not simply a decline in manners. It is a functional adaptation to an attention economy that treats moral anger as a renewable resource, harvested at scale and reinvested into the machinery that produces it.

Mobilising outrage as political infrastructure

'The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility' examines how outrage exploitation networks convert moral anger into a durable mechanism of mobilisation, transforming media exposure into political action without the need for formal organisation or central command. What appears at first glance as spontaneous grassroots fury is better understood as a mediated process in which emotional stimulation precedes political participation, and outrage functions as the primary recruiting device. Individuals do not enter movements through ideological conversion alone but through repeated affective exposure that teaches them what to feel before teaching them what to believe. Outrage exploitation networks operate by collapsing the distance between media consumption and political engagement. Anger heard in the living room or car radio does not remain private; it spills outward into demonstrations, local chapters, online forums, and eventually electoral behaviour. The transition from audience to activist is facilitated by media figures who frame indignation as both moral duty and proof of awareness. Outrage becomes a credential. To feel angry is to be awake, informed, and ethically aligned. In this way, outrage media do not merely comment on politics but act as informal organisers, supplying narratives, targets, and emotional scripts that local actors can immediately adopt. What distinguishes this form of mobilisation from earlier political movements is its decentralised yet synchronised character. There is no single command centre directing action. Instead, outrage exploitation networks function as a distributed nervous system, transmitting cues across platforms that local actors translate into protests, meetings, disruptions, and campaign interventions. Media amplification replaces hierarchy. Shared

emotional tone substitutes for programme or discipline. Participants remain loosely organised but tightly aligned, bound together by common affect rather than formal membership. Outrage proves especially effective as a mobilising force because it thrives on grievance, resentment, and perceived exclusion. Participants are repeatedly told that legitimate channels of representation have failed, that institutions are hostile, and that ordinary citizens are being ignored or deceived. This framing legitimises norm-breaking behaviour as a justified response to structural disrespect. Shouting, disruption, and incivility are reframed as democratic resistance rather than abuse. Anger becomes evidence of authenticity. The more intense the emotion, the more real the politics appears. Outrage exploitation networks also benefit from the visual and performative qualities of anger. Confrontation produces spectacle, and spectacle attracts coverage. Media systems reward scenes of visible rage because they are emotionally legible, easily circulated, and compatible with the rhythms of continuous news. Once early confrontations receive extensive attention, they become templates that others imitate. Mobilisation then requires little coordination. Small groups, alerted through email lists or talk radio cues, can recreate the same theatrical forms in new locations. Outrage spreads by example rather than instruction. Crucially, outrage-based mobilisation does not depend on novelty alone. It is sustained through repetition and reinforcement. Media figures revisit the same grievances daily, reframe defeats as betrayals, and reinterpret setbacks as further proof of systemic corruption. This feedback loop stabilises commitment even when concrete victories are rare. Participants remain engaged not because outcomes improve but because emotional investment deepens. Anger becomes habitual, and political identity fuses with the expectation of perpetual conflict. Outrage exploitation networks also lower the barriers to political participation. Individuals with little prior experience can enter politics through accessible actions that promise immediate emotional reward. Attendance at rallies, disruption of meetings, or online amplification offers instant recognition and belonging. These activities require time and energy but minimal institutional knowledge. Mobilisation thus favours intensity over expertise and commitment over competence. What matters is not strategic effectiveness but visible passion. Over time, this mode of mobilisation reshapes political competition. Movements born through outrage pressure established parties not by persuasion but by threat. Incumbents learn that deviation invites exposure, ridicule, and targeted anger. Elections become signalling contests in which candidates demonstrate loyalty through rhetorical extremity. Outrage functions less as a means of winning majorities than as a tool for enforcing discipline within factions. In this sense, outrage exploitation networks should be understood as infrastructures of emotional governance. They do not simply react to political developments; they actively manufacture the conditions under which anger feels necessary, virtuous, and inevitable. Mobilisation becomes a permanent state rather than a temporary phase. Politics is reorganised around sustained indignation, and communities are held together not by shared solutions but by shared enemies.

4.3 Propaganda 2.1 Model

What is Propaganda 2.1 Model?

Drawing on Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's Manufacturing Consent and Christian Fuchs's concept of 'Propaganda 2.0', this section develops the Propaganda 2.1 model as a further theoretical refinement adapted to the political economy of contemporary platform capitalism. The Propaganda 2.1 model does not reject earlier propaganda theories but repositions them within a digital environment in which persuasion, ideology and belief

formation have been structurally subordinated to revenue optimisation. Whereas classical propaganda models presupposed relatively stable narratives, identifiable ideological goals and a desire to shape opinion, Propaganda 2.1 describes a media system organised around the manufacture of dissent and the monetisation of outrage as its primary economic function. Within this framework, propaganda no longer aims at consensus or even durable polarisation. Instead, it operates through the continuous stimulation of moral anger, irritation and perceived injury, generating engagement that can be measured, traded and monetised. The central formula of the model, 'manufacture of dissent plus monetisation of outrage', captures this shift. Dissent is not an unintended by-product of free expression but a deliberately cultivated condition of permanent antagonism. Outrage becomes the most efficient unit of value extraction, replacing argument, persuasion and ideological coherence with affective volatility. Propaganda 2.1 identifies three interlocking mechanisms that structure this regime. The first is rage-baiting, understood not simply as sensationalism but as an industrial process through which moral transgression is algorithmically prioritised. Content is framed to trigger humiliation, resentment or indignation rather than understanding. The aim is not to convince but to provoke, ensuring repeated interaction through cycles of anger, rebuttal and escalation. In this environment, truth becomes secondary to emotional charge. What matters is not whether a claim is accurate but whether it reliably activates outrage within a target audience. Public discourse thus shifts from deliberation to performative moral conflict, organised around visibility rather than validity. The second mechanism is semantic banalisation through automated content production, often described as 'AI slop'. Unlike classical propaganda, which distorted meaning through selective framing or omission, Propaganda 2.1 operates by flooding the communicative environment with syntactically fluent but cognitively empty material. Meaning is not attacked directly but diluted through excess. Automated texts, recycled narratives and algorithmically generated commentary exhaust attention without contributing understanding. This produces a condition in which citizens are surrounded by language yet deprived of orientation. The result is not false consciousness but semantic fatigue, a state in which the capacity to distinguish relevance, credibility or consequence is gradually eroded. The third mechanism is parasociality as simulated intimacy. Platform architectures increasingly replace civic participation and social reciprocity with managed emotional attachment to influencers, branded personalities and automated agents. These relationships create a sense of belonging without obligation, responsibility or mutual recognition. Emotional proximity substitutes for political engagement, while loyalty is directed toward figures optimised for attention rather than institutions accountable to collective interests. Artificial intimacy stabilises outrage by personalising it, allowing moral anger to circulate through familiar faces and recurring personas rather than abstract issues. Together, these mechanisms describe a propaganda system that no longer depends on belief, ideological consistency or shared truth. Outrage replaces conviction, automation replaces meaning, and simulated intimacy replaces sociality. Public opinion, traditionally understood as a deliberative force emerging from shared informational environments, is progressively hollowed out. What remains is a marketplace of emotions in which attention is continuously harvested while collective judgement dissolves. Within the broader argument of this book, the Propaganda 2.1 model marks a transition from the manufacture of dissent to the liquidation of public opinion itself. When media systems no longer seek to persuade but to provoke, propaganda ceases to function as ideological guidance and becomes an infrastructure of affect extraction. Moral anger is no longer a response to injustice but a programmable resource. The public sphere persists in form but not in function, operating less as a space for political reasoning than as a circulation system for monetised outrage. In this

sense, Propaganda 2.1 does not merely describe a new phase of propaganda but signals a deeper transformation in the relationship between language, power and democratic life.

From Manufacturing Consent to Monetised Dissent

Building on Joan Pedro's 'The Propaganda Model in the Early 21st Century[80]', this section reframes the five-filter model for the digital political economy addressed in this chapter. The original propaganda model identified ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak and dominant ideology as structural filters that shaped media output while preserving the appearance of free and objective journalism. In the context of platform capitalism, these filters have not disappeared. They have been reengineered around engagement metrics, algorithmic governance and the economic logic of outrage. In the classical model, ownership concentration disciplined journalism toward elite consensus. In the digital environment, ownership is even more concentrated, but the dominant actors are no longer traditional media conglomerates alone. Global technology platforms own not content but infrastructures of visibility, ranking and circulation. Their profitability does not depend on ideological coherence or political stability, but on maximising engagement velocity. As a result, the ownership filter now privileges content that intensifies emotional reaction. Algorithms are calibrated to reward outrage, humiliation and moral conflict because these affects generate longer sessions, more interactions and higher data yields. Ownership thus aligns structural power directly with rage-baiting, transforming emotional volatility into a corporate asset. Advertising remains the central revenue mechanism, yet its function has shifted from supporting media institutions to extracting value from individual behaviour. Programmatic advertising rewards attention time, repetition and behavioural intensity rather than credibility or informational quality. Content that provokes anger consistently outperforms content that informs, because outrage prolongs exposure and multiplies impressions. The advertising filter therefore no longer indirectly shapes content toward moderation but actively incentivises polarisation. Emotional disturbance becomes measurable, targetable and monetisable, embedding outrage at the core of the media economy. Sourcing, once dominated by government and corporate elites, undergoes a paradoxical transformation. While official sources remain powerful, they now compete with a vast flood of user-generated material circulating without editorial mediation. Sensational, polarising and unverifiable narratives often outperform institutional journalism because they appeal directly to pre-existing moral identities. This does not democratise truth but destabilises epistemic hierarchies. The sourcing filter no longer stabilises authority but fragments it, allowing rage-driven narratives to eclipse factual reporting. Verification becomes a disadvantage in an attention economy where speed and emotional charge determine visibility. Flak mutates from an organised but relatively slow disciplinary mechanism into a continuous digital harassment infrastructure. Lawsuits, complaints and pressure campaigns are supplemented by bots, coordinated pile-ons, mass reporting and algorithmic suppression. Outrage itself becomes a weapon. Individuals and institutions are disciplined not only through criticism but through overwhelming volume, reputational damage and deplatforming. The function of flak intensifies as dissenting voices are buried under automated hostility, while conformity is rewarded with visibility and protection. The ideological filter undergoes the most radical transformation. Where anti-communism or the war on terror once provided a stable unifying enemy, the

[80] Pedro, J. (2011) 'The Propaganda Model in the Early 21st Century', International Journal of Communication, 5, pp. 1865–1892.

platform environment produces an endlessly renewable culture war. Ideology no longer consolidates consensus but fragments publics into antagonistic moral camps. Identity conflicts, symbolic enemies and moral panics become interchangeable resources for engagement. Division is no longer a failure of propaganda but its economic success. Ideology functions less as a doctrine than as a switching mechanism that keeps outrage circulating. Joan Pedro's reformulation of the propaganda model clarifies that these filters should be understood as dynamic mechanisms rather than fixed categories. His distinction between primary structural filters and secondary factors such as professional norms or individual agency helps explain why apparent diversity and autonomy coexist with deep systemic constraint. Within the framework of this book, this insight is extended further. The decisive shift is not merely from manufacturing consent to manufacturing dissent, but from shaping belief to extracting affect. The audience's emotional reaction becomes the primary commodity, while public opinion loses its deliberative function. In the Propaganda 2.1 environment, rage-baiting is no longer a distortion of journalism but its structural foundation. The system does not seek stable conviction but sustained volatility. Anger drives engagement, engagement drives revenue, and revenue entrenches an economy of permanent manufactured dissent. The five filters continue to operate, but they now converge on a single outcome: the systematic monetisation of moral outrage as the dominant technology of power in the digital public sphere.

When Outrage Becomes Profitable

Alan MacLeod's edited volume[81] Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent traces the transition from classical propaganda models to what this chapter defines as Propaganda 2.1. In the original propaganda model, developed for the era of broadcast mass media, power was stabilised through the manufacture of consent. A limited number of channels, slow circulation and strong institutional authority allowed structural filters such as ownership concentration, advertising dependency, elite sourcing, organised flak and a unifying ideology to shape news in ways that appeared neutral while reproducing dominant interests. Propaganda functioned by narrowing the horizon of acceptable opinion, marginalising dissent and aligning public perception with elite priorities. Peter Ayolov's Propaganda 2.0 situates the contemporary online media environment within a different economic and technological logic. With the rise of platform capitalism, social media and real-time analytics, the decisive discovery was not ideological but behavioural. Engagement metrics revealed that moral anger, humiliation and symbolic conflict consistently outperform balanced information or rational debate. The formula 'angry people click more' captures this transformation. Online media ceased to prioritise consensus and began to systematically manufacture dissent because dissent proved more profitable. Polarisation, outrage and emotional volatility were no longer treated as side effects of communication but as its core drivers. What appeared as social fragmentation from the perspective of users emerged as stable and scalable revenue from the perspective of platforms. This shift reactivated a renewed principle of divide and rule. Instead of addressing a unified public, platforms fragment audiences into antagonistic ideological, cultural and identity-based camps. The public sphere is reorganised into a field of permanent symbolic warfare, described in this book as an online civil cold war. Societies conduct continuous internal conflicts that generate endless cycles of scandal, resentment and fear. For users, this environment feels

[81] MacLeod, A. (ed.) (2019) Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent. London: Routledge.

chaotic and exhausting; for platforms it produces predictable patterns of engagement. The epistemic consequences are severe. In a communicative space governed by emotional optimisation, verifiable knowledge loses authority. Facts are not refuted through argument but drowned in competing narratives chosen for their affective resonance. Users remain formally free to select sources, yet this freedom operates only within menus curated by algorithmic infrastructures. Truth is exchanged for belonging, and the collective lie becomes a condition of social participation. Propaganda 2.1 extends this logic further by accounting for automation, generative systems and the industrial production of content. In this phase, the manufacture of dissent is no longer driven solely by human polarisation but by the banalisation of meaning itself. Automated texts flood the public sphere with syntactically fluent but cognitively weightless material. Meaning is not distorted but diluted through excess. Attention is exhausted rather than persuaded. Outrage is no longer merely monetised; it is scaled, replicated and normalised, while parasocial simulations increasingly replace social bonds and civic relations. Across this trajectory, propaganda evolves from manufacturing consent, through manufacturing dissent, to monetising outrage and liquidating meaning, tracing a direct line between technological development and the degradation of public communication. Alan MacLeod's Propaganda in the Information Age is positioned at a hinge moment in this transition. The volume seeks to defend the continuing relevance of Herman and Chomsky's model under conditions of platform monopolies and digital distribution. Its central claim is that corporate media remains structurally aligned with elite interests and that the five filters still operate. This insistence on structural analysis remains valuable, particularly against liberal narratives that treat misinformation as a cognitive failure of audiences or a moral failure of individual journalists. The collection correctly rejects conspiratorial explanations and emphasises ownership, market dependence and institutional routines as determinants of media output. Yet the book's subtitle, 'Still Manufacturing Consent', also marks its limitation. By stressing continuity, it risks misdescribing the dominant tendency of engagement-driven media. The five filters can indeed be mapped onto the digital environment, but consent is no longer the primary product. A media system can remain structurally loyal to power while maximising profit through polarisation, scandal and outrage rather than ideological alignment. Propaganda can serve elite interests without producing agreement. In this sense, dissent itself becomes a managed and monetised commodity. Within the framework of this chapter, Propaganda 2.1 names this shift explicitly. The central function of contemporary propaganda is no longer to secure belief but to sustain reaction. Attention is captured through provocation and retained through conflict. Consent, where it exists, takes the form of habituation rather than conviction, a learned readiness to react on cue within a permanently agitated communicative environment. This transition marks not the end of propaganda, but its transformation into a technology of power optimised for emotional extraction rather than public persuasion.

Manufacturing Noise and Semantic Exhaustion

Drawing on Alan MacLeod's edited volume Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent and Christian Fuchs's chapter 'Propaganda 2.0: Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in the Age of the Internet, Big Data and Social Media', this section examines a decisive shift in the logic of propaganda toward what can be described as the manufacturing of noise. The central limitation of MacLeod's volume lies not in its defence of Herman and Chomsky's structural critique, which remains analytically sound, but in its implicit assumption that digital platforms merely extend older propaganda mechanisms. This

assumption obscures a deeper historical transition in which each new media ecology generates its own communicative rules. Platforms do not simply transmit messages more efficiently; they rewrite what counts as a message in the first place. In the mid-2020s, the dominant form of consent is increasingly not consent to a specific ideology, policy, or worldview, but consent to banality. Public language is saturated with endlessly replicated, low-intensity discourse that fills communicative space while hollowing out deliberative capacity. Generative systems accelerate what can be described as semantic inflation. Text becomes abundant, stylistically plausible, and instantly shareable, while meaning loses scarcity, friction, and cost. Under these conditions, propaganda no longer needs to impose a single coherent narrative. It can flood the field until distinctions between persuasion, information, entertainment, and automated filler collapse into practical irrelevance. The result is not mass deception in the classical sense, but cognitive exhaustion and interpretive apathy. If anything deserves the name ‘manufacturing consent’ in this environment, it is the production of passive acceptance that public language is disposable, that political ideas function as content, and that social change can be reduced to performative scripts, monetised lectures, or influencer-ready slogans. This marks a qualitative shift from ideological control toward environmental saturation. Meaning is not attacked directly; it is worn down through excess. A further limitation of MacLeod’s framework follows from its largely news-centred orientation. Although the volume expands the propaganda model to include fake news, bots, elections, and entertainment, journalism remains the primary theatre of analysis. The platform age, however, collapses the boundary between journalism and non-journalism. Memes, livestreams, reaction videos, micro-celebrity commentary, recommender feeds, and parasocial performance do not supplement news; they reconstitute the conditions under which news is perceived at all. Propaganda increasingly travels through simulated intimacy and identity theatre, where persuasive force lies less in argument than in affective synchronisation, belonging, and moral alignment. A model anchored too firmly in newsroom institutions risks missing how power now operates through emotional proximity rather than informational authority. MacLeod is correct to insist that ownership concentration, advertising incentives, elite sourcing, and disciplinary flak still structure the media environment. Yet the phrase ‘still manufacturing consent’ risks functioning as an analytical comfort zone, implying continuity where a shift in dominant tendency has occurred. The historical trajectory addressed in this chapter moves from manufacturing consent in the broadcast era, to manufacturing dissent through engagement economics, and now toward monetising outrage while banalising meaning through automated production. Consent has not disappeared; it has mutated into consent to noise, exhaustion, and a permanently activated public sphere that struggles to generate durable understanding or coherent collective action. Christian Fuchs’s reformulation of Propaganda 2.0 is crucial at this point because it treats the propaganda model not as a fixed schema but as an operating system for critique. Fuchs insists on two claims that remain foundational. First, wealth and power continue to shape visibility, amplification, and marginalisation. Second, the original model was never exhaustive, particularly in its treatment of entertainment, spectacle, and depoliticisation. This implies that the model must be continuously patched and extended as media infrastructures evolve. In Fuchs’s analysis, the ownership filter shifts decisively toward platform capitalism. The most powerful media actors are no longer primarily content producers but controllers of search, feeds, and recommendation systems. Their power is exercised through opaque algorithms that function as public gateways to information while remaining outside public control. Advertising becomes more invasive and more intimate, transforming audiences into sources of behavioural data and unpaid labour. Engagement is not a cultural accident but an economic necessity. Sourcing multiplies rather than disappears, as visibility becomes the

central scarce resource. Flak is upgraded into automated intimidation, bot-driven harassment, and networked pressure campaigns that manufacture the appearance of public opinion. The ideology filter becomes more flexible and more volatile, as emotionally charged narratives are algorithmically rewarded regardless of their coherence or truth value. Taken together, these developments confirm the argument advanced in this chapter. The propaganda model no longer operates primarily by shaping belief, but by structuring attention, affect, and exhaustion. Propaganda 2.1 names this condition precisely: a system in which noise itself becomes a technology of power, and where the degradation of meaning is not a failure of communication but its most profitable outcome.

The Complete Meltdown of Truth Online

A defining feature of the Propaganda 2.1 model: the complete meltdown of truth through recursive repetition, circular referencing and self-quotation within online media systems. In this environment, truth does not disappear through censorship or deliberate falsification alone, but through a structural transformation in how statements acquire legitimacy. What emerges is a regime in which repetition replaces verification, reference substitutes for evidence, and authority is simulated through circulation itself. Online media environments reward speed, emotional resonance and shareability rather than epistemic grounding. As a result, statements increasingly gain credibility not by being checked against reality but by being echoed across multiple outlets. When a claim appears simultaneously on news sites, social platforms and search results, it acquires the appearance of facticity regardless of its origin. Propaganda 2.1 intensifies this dynamic by dissolving the distinction between source and citation. In classical journalism, attribution functioned as a chain linking statements to identifiable speakers, institutions or documents. In the digital environment, this chain collapses into loops. A media outlet cites a spokesperson; the spokesperson shares the media article; subsequent outlets cite the article or the social media post; search engines index all instances as independent confirmations. At the end of this cycle, a single unverified statement appears as a widely corroborated fact. Crucially, it becomes possible for one speaker to quote their own words indirectly through media repetition, while the system registers this as external validation. No single actor needs to lie. The architecture itself performs the distortion. This recursive logic produces what can be described as a meltdown of truth rather than its negation. Facts are not replaced by clear falsehoods but submerged within layers of reference that obscure their status. The question ‘Is this true?’ is displaced by ‘Who else is saying this?’ In Propaganda 2.1, the answer to the second question is enough to settle the first. Search engines, trending metrics and algorithmic ranking systems reinforce this effect by privileging frequency, engagement and network centrality. What circulates most widely becomes what appears most real. In an environment of continuous electronic flow, the effect of communication matters more than its content. Truth becomes a social effect rather than an empirical condition. Statements operate as signals of belonging within moral communities, not as propositions subject to verification. Online communities cohere around shared narratives that need not be factually grounded as long as they sustain collective identity and moral alignment. In this sense, truth becomes whatever maintains cohesion within a given media space. The Aleppo case illustrates this mechanism with particular clarity. A single emotionally charged phrase The Complete Meltdown of Humanity in Aleppo", attributed to a UN spokesperson, circulates rapidly across global media. Its origin is unclear, its status ambiguous, and its factual grounding uncertain. Yet through repetition and cross-referencing, the phrase hardens into an apparent truth. Media

outlets cite each other; social media amplifies the quotation; search engines present thousands of results. At no point is there a stable reference to an original, verifiable statement. Instead, the system produces truthiness: a statement that feels true because it is everywhere. What distinguishes this process from classical propaganda is not bias or agenda-setting, both of which are present, but the technological possibility of circular validation. Internet media allow statements to be edited, deleted and recontextualised retroactively, further eroding temporal and evidential anchoring. Fact-checking tools exist, yet they are overwhelmed by volume and velocity. Verification becomes theoretically possible but practically inaccessible. The audience encounters not competing facts but competing realities, each supported by dense webs of internal reference. Within the Propaganda 2.1 model, this collapse of truth serves a clear function. Moral outrage thrives in conditions of epistemic uncertainty. When facts are unstable, emotional framing becomes decisive. Accusations, indignation and symbolic condemnation travel faster than careful qualification. Authority migrates from institutions to affective cues, while truth becomes a rhetorical label attached to statements that successfully mobilise attention and alignment. The system does not require consensus on facts; it requires only sustained reaction. The complete meltdown of truth online is therefore not a failure of technology but one of its most effective outcomes. It allows propaganda to operate without needing to persuade or deceive in the traditional sense. Repetition replaces argument, circulation replaces evidence, and reference replaces reality. In this environment, truth does not end; it dissolves into a self-referential loop in which statements validate themselves simply by continuing to exist. This is not post-truth as moral decay, but post-truth as infrastructure, a defining characteristic of Propaganda 2.1 and a central mechanism through which public opinion is transformed into a permanently reactive, emotionally governed field.

Moral Panic and Digital Giants

Borrowing from Evgeny Morozov's 'The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet'[82] , this section reframes 'engineering dissent' as a core pathway into the Propaganda 2.1 model, where the disappearance of truth is not an accident but a profitable feature of the environment. The central hypothesis is simple: in contemporary platform systems, power often gains more from persistent disagreement than from shared judgement, because polarisation produces attention, attention produces data, and data produces revenue. Under these conditions, the political struggle over 'truth regulation' becomes structurally secondary. The result is a media ecology that rewards disagreement as a resource and treats factuality as optional. This is why internet infrastructure matters more than declared motives. Online systems make it easy to manipulate text, image, sound and video, to delete or revise posts retroactively, and to cite unverified content from social platforms while retaining plausible deniability. Even reputable outlets can launder uncertainty by attributing claims to 'what is being said online', shifting responsibility from evidence to circulation. In the Propaganda 2.1 model, this produces a looped reality in which repetition substitutes for verification. The same statement can pass from a post to a headline to a broadcast segment to a search result and return again to social media as 'confirmed', even if the only confirmation is that the statement has travelled. At the limit, a single actor can appear to 'quote' an external source while effectively quoting themselves through an intermediate platform, and the system's appetite for references disguises the

[82] Morozov, E. (2012) The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom. New York: PublicAffairs.

circularity. In his 2017 article[83] 'Moral panic about false news conceals true enemies – the digital giants', Evgeny Morozov argues that public anxiety about fake news obscures the structural beneficiaries of disinformation, above all Facebook and Google, whose platforms profit directly from the circulation of polarising and misleading content during events such as the 2016 US presidential election and the Brexit referendum. Yet the dynamics of engineered dissent are not confined to digital platforms alone. Traditional media organisations also benefit economically from sustained conflict and outrage. CNN's record profits in 2016–2017 coincided with its highly publicised feud with Donald Trump, illustrating how antagonism itself becomes a revenue-generating spectacle. As documented in a 2017 New York Times analysis of the relationship between CNN president Jeff Zucker and Trump, this conflict functioned as a form of symbiosis: CNN gained ratings and advertising income, while Trump gained constant visibility and media dominance. The danger, therefore, lies not only in false information but in an economic system that rewards polarisation across both legacy and digital media. When information providers are not held accountable for factual accuracy, disinformation becomes structurally advantageous, enabling the engineering of dissent and accelerating the complete meltdown of truth. The Trump-era media economy offers a vivid illustration of this mechanism without requiring a single coordinating hand. Public feuds between political figures and major media organisations can generate mutual gain, converting conflict into ratings, and ratings into legitimacy. The spectacle of antagonism functions as a joint attention machine: media profits from outrage-driven coverage, while political actors profit from visibility and the mobilisation of loyal moral communities. In this cycle, the question 'Is it true?' is overshadowed by 'Does it work for the audience?' The older propaganda maxim that truth is what works returns, not as cynical philosophy but as an infrastructural rule. Propaganda 2.1 therefore names a historical mutation. Propaganda no longer relies primarily on persuading a population to accept an official narrative. It can allow multiple competing narratives to flourish, provided that each narrative anchors a community, intensifies engagement, and sustains reaction. The complete meltdown of truth is the predictable outcome: not the triumph of one lie, but the exhaustion of verification under a flood of recursive references, performative certainty and algorithmic amplification. In the end, the medium does not merely carry political conflict. The medium composes the conditions under which conflict becomes the default form of public life.

The Evolution of Propaganda Model

'The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness' edited[84] by Joan Pedro-Carañana, Daniel Broudy and Jeffery Klaehn reaffirms the relevance of Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model while repositioning it within the structural transformations addressed in this chapter. The volume insists that the propaganda model was never conceived as a closed doctrine but as a dynamic analytical framework capable of travelling across historical moments, political systems and media technologies. Its durability, the editors argue, explains both its continued explanatory power and its systematic marginalisation within mainstream academia and corporate journalism. The reception history of the model thus becomes part of its own empirical confirmation. Since the publication of Manufacturing

[83] Morozov, Evgeny. 08.01.2017. The Guardian: Moral panic over fake news hides the real enemy – the digital giants. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/08/blaming-fake-news-not-the-answer-democracy-crisis,

[84] Pedro-Carañana, J., Broudy, D. and Klaehn, J. (eds.) (2018) The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness. London: University of Westminster Press.

Consent in 1988, the model has been repeatedly dismissed as conspiratorial, deterministic or reductive, a pattern that aligns precisely with Herman and Chomsky's prediction that critiques exposing structural power would themselves be filtered out of legitimate discourse. At the same time, the editors document a sustained global revival of the model among critical scholars who have applied it to contexts ranging from war reporting and entertainment media to European, Latin American and post-colonial settings. This revival demonstrates that the propaganda model does not depend on a specific national media system but addresses the structural conditions under which information is produced in capitalist democracies. Central to this argument is the model's grounding in radical political economy. Media bias is not explained as the moral failure of journalists or as episodic ideological deviation, but as the systemic outcome of capitalist organisation. Media institutions operate within an alliance of corporate capital and State power whose interests converge around market discipline, militarism and the reproduction of inequality. The five filters are therefore not independent variables but interlocking mechanisms that stabilise this order while preserving the appearance of pluralism and free debate. The editors are careful to delimit the scope of the model. It is not presented as a universal law of communication applicable to all societies. In contexts where coercion replaces ideology or where collective goals are genuinely shared, the manufacture of consent is unnecessary. In capitalist democracies, however, overt repression would be politically illegitimate, making propaganda the primary technology of rule. This insight situates the model within a longer intellectual lineage extending from Machiavelli and Comte through Gramsci to Bernays, Lippmann and Lasswell, all of whom recognised that modern power operates through the management of perception, emotion and belief rather than through force alone. The volume's engagement with digital media is particularly relevant for the argument developed in this chapter. The editors reject techno-utopian assumptions that the internet naturally produces democratisation and equality. Instead, they document the rapid enclosure of digital communication by corporate and State power, resulting in a hybrid system of surveillance, commodification and algorithmic control. Platforms initially imagined as tools of emancipation are now integral to global capital accumulation and political influence. Communication technologies no longer merely transmit ideology; they increasingly function as ideological infrastructures in their own right. This infrastructural shift modifies the operation of the five filters without eliminating them. Ownership now extends beyond newspapers and broadcasters to platform monopolies that structure visibility through opaque algorithms. Advertising evolves into a regime of behavioural manipulation based on data extraction and micro-targeting rather than simple product placement. Sourcing is no longer dominated exclusively by official institutions but is supplemented by influencer cultures, pseudo-expertise and algorithmically amplified user-generated ideology. Flak mutates into digital harassment, coordinated outrage campaigns and networked intimidation. Ideology fragments from a single unifying enemy into fluid culture wars and identity conflicts that can be rapidly reconfigured. The editors describe this configuration as a system of symbolic violence in which liberal media play a particularly strategic role. Liberal outlets often present themselves as defenders of diversity and rights while systematically avoiding challenges to the economic foundations of capitalism. This practice aligns with what Nancy Fraser has termed progressive neoliberalism, where cultural recognition coexists with economic domination. By expanding the boundaries of representation while narrowing the limits of economic critique, liberal media govern discourse without appearing to do so. Importantly, the volume avoids fatalism. Digital media remain contradictory spaces in which control and resistance coexist. Alternative outlets and critical movements periodically open fractures in the system, especially during crises. Yet these openings are fragile and easily

reabsorbed. The editors therefore conclude that meaningful media transformation requires broader social change, including the dismantling of the corporate-State nexus that structures communication. Within the framework of this chapter, this conclusion points toward the next evolution of the propaganda model. Propaganda no longer merely filters news; it increasingly organises attention, emotion and belief at the infrastructural level. The model thus survives not as a static schema but as a developmental system, moving toward versions such as Propaganda 2.1 as each media transformation generates new rules for the production of social reality.

Propaganda 3.0 and the Operating System of Power

'The Propaganda Model Today: Filtering Perception and Awareness' treats the propaganda model not as a historical artefact but as a living diagnostic framework whose hypotheses must be continuously assessed and updated in line with changing media infrastructures. In the concluding synthesis of the volume, the editors return to the three core hypotheses formulated by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky and ask a forward-looking question that is central to this chapter: if the model still works empirically, what version of the media 'operating system' is now in place, and what must a contemporary propaganda model be able to detect? The first hypothesis concerns content alignment. Where elite interests are strong, elite consensus is broad, and oppositional forces are weak or fragmented, dominant media will tend to support elite projects at home and abroad. The evidence assembled across the volume confirms this pattern across multiple domains. Mainstream coverage continues to distinguish between 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims, to amplify some conflicts while ignoring structurally similar ones, and to normalise certain forms of violence while moralising others. Even when issues such as climate change receive intense attention, the underlying political-economic drivers are rarely subjected to sustained analysis. The decisive boundary is therefore not visibility but explanation. Events may be described vividly while systemic causes remain beyond the horizon of legitimate discourse. A key extension of this hypothesis lies in the expansion of what counts as media. The model is no longer applied solely to news but to entertainment ecosystems, including television formats, professional sports, videogames, search engines, social networks and film. Here propaganda operates less through overt messaging than through expectation management. Entertainment stabilises assumptions about hierarchy, violence, institutions and human nature, functioning as a soft infrastructure of consent that trains perception while presenting itself as leisure. The second hypothesis concerns mechanism. In media systems governed by market forces rather than direct censorship, the five filters of ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak and dominant ideology should strongly shape output. The editors conclude that these filters are not weakened in digital capitalism but intensified. Ownership consolidates under financialised corporate structures and platform monopolies. Advertising mutates into surveillance-based targeting and behavioural manipulation. Sourcing remains tethered to institutional power while expanding to include bots, pseudo-experts and algorithmically amplified narratives. Flak becomes faster, cheaper and more pervasive through networked harassment and coordinated outrage. Ideology no longer revolves around a single enemy but fragments into flexible fear narratives, securitised language and culture-war antagonisms. At the same time, the editors emphasise a dialectical feature crucial for any updated model. Wherever commodification expands, practices of resistance and alternative communication also emerge. Digital systems lower the technical threshold for participation, allowing unprecedented numbers of people to publish, remix and distribute content. This does not dissolve hierarchy, since visibility remains highly concentrated, but it alters the terrain of

struggle. Exceptions to the model are not anomalies to be dismissed but empirical clues about where the system is vulnerable, contingent or temporarily unstable. This insight leads to the question of extensibility. If content alignment and filtering mechanisms remain empirically robust, are they sufficient to explain the contemporary media environment? The editors propose several extensions that point toward what might be described as Propaganda 3.0. One is the concept of a wider propaganda and security system, encompassing not only media but the coordinated environment of state institutions, corporate power, intelligence agencies, public relations industries, think tanks, NGOs and academic gatekeeping. Propaganda here does not merely influence audiences; its pre-structures reality by shaping what can appear, circulate and be recognised as meaningful in the first place. Another extension concerns agency. The model's structural emphasis is retained, but structure is understood as operating through professional socialisation, precarity, fear, incentives and occasional resistance. Journalists internalise institutional values, yet moments of crisis, collective organisation and reputational competition can open narrow spaces of autonomy. These openings are unstable but real, and they matter for understanding how propaganda systems adapt rather than simply impose. The third hypothesis concerns marginalisation. Critical studies of media performance tend to be ignored or sidelined, not through overt censorship but through political economy within academia itself. Funding, prestige and publication incentives favour depoliticised research that avoids naming structural power. The model thus predicts not only media behaviour but the boundaries of permissible critique within knowledge production. Taken together, the volume's conclusion implies a decisive shift. Media power is migrating from content to infrastructure. The crucial mechanisms increasingly operate at the level of platform design, algorithmic ranking, attention engineering and behavioural prediction. If the classical model described manufacturing consent under broadcast capitalism, the emerging model describes a system in which the media environment itself functions as the operating system of power. Propaganda no longer primarily persuades. It organises default perceptions, default emotions and default antagonisms before any message is consciously processed. In this sense, Propaganda 3.0 does not replace earlier versions but incorporates them, recognising that contemporary power operates less by convincing people what to think than by engineering the conditions under which thinking, reacting and belonging take place at all.

5. Conclusion: The Morality of Anger

The moral ambivalence of anger

Drawing on debates in moral psychology and philosophy, particularly the work of Martha Nussbaum, Myisha Cherry, David Shoemaker and Laura Silva, this section situates the morality of anger within the broader architecture of moral outrage networks and the political economy of contemporary communication. Anger has long occupied an unstable position in ethical thought, oscillating between condemnation as a destructive vice and defence as a necessary moral resource. Within the framework of this book, anger is not treated as a purely internal emotion but as a socially mediated force whose moral status changes once it becomes infrastructural, amplified, and strategically mobilised. Classical and modern philosophy already register this ambivalence. Seneca treated anger as a form of madness, an affect that overrides

reason and invites cruelty. Martha Nussbaum[85] develops this sceptical tradition by arguing that anger is conceptually tied to retribution, even when it presents itself as moral. In her account, anger involves a wish for payback, a backward-looking fantasy that something bad should happen to the offender in compensation for the original harm. Because no retaliation can undo past injury, such thinking is described as irrational or 'magical'. Nussbaum therefore proposes what she calls transitional anger, an affective shift that abandons retribution and redirects moral energy toward future-oriented concerns such as reform, prevention and social welfare. Against this rejection stands a rehabilitative tradition that treats anger as conditionally virtuous. Aristotle famously argued that anger can be appropriate when directed at the right object, in the right measure, and for the right reasons. Contemporary defenders such as Myisha Cherry[86] extend this claim into the terrain of structural injustice, insisting that moral anger is indispensable for confronting racism, sexism and systemic humiliation. In this view, anger is not primarily about punishment but about demanding recognition, dignity and repair. Without anger, injustice is normalised; moral injury becomes invisible. The tension between these positions hinges on a crucial distinction between justified and unjustified anger. Moral psychology increasingly frames this distinction in terms of fittingness or appropriateness. Justified anger arises in response to genuine moral violation. It signals that a boundary has been crossed and that equal standing has been denied. Such anger is closely tied to self-respect and to the refusal of humiliation. Unjustified anger, by contrast, often takes the form of what might be called arrogant anger. It is triggered not by injustice but by perceived threats to status, dominance or superiority. This form of anger is self-referential and fragile, dependent on external validation rather than mutual recognition among equals. Within outrage-driven media environments, this distinction becomes dangerously blurred. Status anxiety is easily reframed as moral injury, while narcissistic grievance is elevated into public outrage. Anger that once functioned as a signal of injustice is transformed into a performative resource, rewarded with attention, visibility and algorithmic amplification. In such conditions, the moral evaluation of anger cannot remain confined to individual psychology; it must account for the communicative systems that select, circulate and monetise it. David Shoemaker offers an important corrective by reframing anger not as retribution but as communication. On this account, anger's primary function is to address the offender, to demand acknowledgment, remorse or repair. Anger, here, is a relational act that presupposes moral community. It aims at reconciliation rather than punishment, even if reconciliation ultimately fails. Shoemaker's emphasis on communication aligns closely with the logic of recognition: anger seeks to restore moral balance by making wrongdoing intelligible and answerable. Yet empirical research complicates any single-function account. Laura Silva's pluralist theory[87] of anger describes it as behaviourally pluripotent. Anger can motivate communication, withdrawal, reconciliation, punishment or retaliation, depending on context, intensity and social cues. Its action tendencies are shaped by moderators such as perceived efficacy, institutional constraints and norms of expression. This pluralism matters greatly in digital environments, where anger is systematically stripped of contextual moderators and repackaged for maximum circulation. Within this book's framework, the decisive question is not whether anger can be moral in principle, but under what conditions it retains moral value once embedded in outrage infrastructures. The answer proposed here follows Cherry's insistence that anger is only morally productive when coupled

[85] Nussbaum, M. (2015) 'Transitional Anger', Journal of the American Philosophical Association, 1(1), pp. 41–56

[86] Cherry, M. and Flanagan, O. (eds) The Moral Psychology of Anger, Rowman & Littlefield

[87] Silva, L. (2022) 'Anger and Its Desires', European Journal of Philosophy, 29(4), pp. 1115–1135.

with compassion, understood in the sense of agape: unconditional goodwill toward others, including wrongdoers. Compassion does not negate anger or excuse harm. Rather, it disciplines anger, preventing its slide into hatred, scapegoating and moral spectacle. Historical examples make this dynamic visible. Figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. did not abandon anger in the face of injustice; they refined it. Anger was directed at systems rather than individuals, paired with an insistence on human dignity even for opponents. This fusion of moral anger and compassion allowed anger to function as a signal for structural change rather than as fuel for endless retaliation. In the context of moral outrage networks, the absence of compassion produces a different outcome. Anger becomes detached from repair and recognition and reattached to visibility, punishment and identity performance. Moral language intensifies while moral responsibility dissipates. The result is not justice but a permanent economy of accusation. The morality of anger, therefore, cannot be assessed in abstraction. Anger is a rational response to injustice insofar as it identifies moral breach and demands acknowledgment. It becomes morally corrosive when it is severed from compassion and absorbed into systems that reward outrage for its own sake. Within contemporary media ecologies, the ethical task is not to eliminate anger but to recover the conditions under which it can still point beyond itself, toward recognition, repair and restraint.

Cultivating anger as care of the self

Jinjin Zhang, Zhiheng Xiong, Hao Zheng and Xiangzhen Ma's article[88] 'The Moral Psychological Justification of Anger: An Exploration of Self-Respect and Recognition' (2024), reframes anger not as a uniform moral emotion but as a singular object of self-knowledge and self-care whose meaning and force differ for each individual. Within the wider argument of this book, anger cannot be treated as a generic moral signal circulating identically across populations. Anger is lived, embodied, remembered, trained and deployed differently by different persons, and this difference matters politically, ethically and psychologically. Much of the classical and contemporary debate treats anger as something to be judged from the outside. Seneca condemns it as destructive madness; Martha Nussbaum[89] treats it as irrational fixation on payback; political moralists warn that anger alienates allies and escalates conflict. These critiques share an assumption that anger is a problem to be eliminated or neutralised. By contrast, recent moral psychology and recognition theory insist that anger often expresses a demand for dignity rather than revenge. Yet even these rehabilitations risk abstraction. They speak about anger in general, as if anger were the same force in every subject. The argument advanced here is different. Anger is not merely something to be understood cognitively, as in 'knowing my anger'. Anger must be cultivated, shaped and cared for. This distinction echoes Michel Foucault's famous contrast between 'know thyself' and 'take care of thyself'. Knowledge alone does not transform conduct. Self-care involves practices, disciplines and techniques through which affects are trained rather than suppressed. Anger offers a privileged site for such care because it reveals, with unusual clarity, where recognition is denied, where self-respect is wounded, and where moral boundaries are experienced as violated. From this perspective, anger becomes a form of ethical energy. Psychological research already shows that anger mobilises attention, heightens agency and motivates action. What matters is not whether

[88] Zhang, J., Xiong, Z., Zheng, H. and Ma, X. (2024) 'The Moral Psychological Justification of Anger: An Exploration of Self-Respect and Recognition', Behavioral Sciences (Basel), 15(1), 3
[89] Nussbaum, M. (2016) Anger and Forgiveness, Oxford University Press

anger exists, but how it is handled. Uncultivated anger tends toward excess, projection and moral absolutism. Cultivated anger, by contrast, becomes directional. It is neither explosive nor inert. It is attentive to proportion, object and timing. Cultivation does not mean repression. It means learning how anger operates within one's own psychic economy, how quickly it ignites, what memories feed it, what language intensifies or calms it, and how it is translated into speech or silence. Zhang and colleagues offer an important conceptual tool by distinguishing between justified and unjustified anger. Justified anger arises from an unfulfilled desire for equal recognition. It expresses wounded self-respect and signals moral injury. Unjustified anger, by contrast, stems from a demand for superiority rather than equality and is often accompanied by arrogance. This distinction cannot be applied mechanically from the outside. It requires reflexive work by the subject. Only sustained attention to one's own anger makes it possible to tell whether anger defends dignity or inflates ego. Here the relevance to contemporary outrage cultures becomes clear. Networked media reward the display of anger but discourage its cultivation. Outrage circulates faster than reflection. Individuals are trained to express anger publicly before they have learned to interpret it privately. The result is not moral clarity but moral noise. In such environments, anger becomes detachable from self-knowledge and is easily instrumentalised by ideological entrepreneurs, platforms and movements that benefit from emotional escalation. Cultivating anger therefore becomes a counter-practice. It resists both moral suppression and algorithmic exploitation. To cultivate anger is to treat it as a signal that demands interpretation rather than immediate discharge. It requires asking what form of recognition is being sought, whether the anger aims at equality or dominance, and whether it opens the possibility of transformation rather than repetition. This practice aligns with Foucault's understanding of care of the self as an ethical labour oriented toward freedom rather than obedience. Anger also offers a rare opportunity for relational knowledge. Encountering another person's anger, when not immediately mirrored or dismissed, provides insight into what that person values, fears or feels deprived of. Cultivated anger thus supports communication rather than escalation. It allows disagreement without dehumanisation and critique without annihilation. In this sense, anger cared for properly becomes compatible with trust, cooperation and civic friendship. Within the broader argument of this book, the moral problem of anger is not solved by praising or condemning it. The central task is learning how to live with anger in conditions where it is constantly provoked, circulated and monetised. Anger that is neither cultivated nor cared for becomes a resource for moral outrage networks. Anger that is cultivated becomes a form of ethical self-governance. This, more than any abstract theory, defines the morality of anger in the present.

Anger and the corruption of judgement

Jeff Rice's The Rhetoric of Outrage: Why Social Media Is Making Us Angry offers a useful starting point[90] for linking outrage theory to the morality of anger, because it treats outrage not as a passing mood but as a communicative technology that reorganises judgement, blame, and the public performance of righteousness. In classical culture, anger could be imagined as an elevated force. Homer opens The Iliad by invoking rage, and Peter Sloterdijk[91] reads that opening as a valuation: rage becomes noteworthy, even proximate to the Good, not a private

[90] Rice, J. (2021) The Rhetoric of Outrage: Why Social Media Is Making Us Angry. New York: Bloomsbury Academic

[91] Sloterdijk, P. (2012) Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation. New York: Columbia University Press

defect but an energetic supplement to the heroic psyche. Modern moral thought finds this hard to accept. Anger is usually moralised as either vice or virtue: condemned as irrational, retributive, and contagious, or defended as an indispensable response to injustice. Outrage theory complicates this old dispute by shifting the focus from what anger is inside a person to what anger becomes once it is built into the medium of public life. Digital outrage rarely begins from a single incident in the way it appears to. It emerges from layered moments accumulated across repeated exposure: stereotypes, historical memory, recurring images, and familiar scripts of condemnation. A post that feels immediate is usually a trigger, not a cause. That matters morally because moral evaluation tends to assume a clean sequence: event, judgement, emotion, response. Outrage networks scramble that order. Emotion often arrives as language first and experience second. A caption, a clip, a screenshot, or a headline supplies a ready-made moral stance and a ready-made target, while the affective charge is borrowed from earlier exposures. The result is a form of anger that feels personal but behaves infrastructurally, carried by the network and reinforced by repetition. Vilém Flusser's idea[92] of the 'technical image' helps explain why outrage can feel morally self-evident while remaining ethically unstable. The technical image is not simply a picture; it is a computed concept, a projection shaped by prior information. What appears as direct access to reality is mediated by an apparatus and by the viewer's accumulated associations. Anger then becomes less a response to a discrete wrong than a computation performed at speed: the mind fills in meanings before careful attention reaches the specific case. Outrage, in this sense, is frequently moral before it is accurate. It mobilises a verdict by activating an already stocked reservoir of moral images. The medium rewards speed and recognisability, not patience or proportion. This is where morality becomes a problem of rhetoric. If anger can be good when it signals violated boundaries, equal recognition, and wounded self-respect, then the moral value of anger depends on its relationship to truth, proportion, and responsibility. Outrage theory shows how easily those conditions are disrupted. A networked environment invites anger to become performative: not only 'I judge this wrong' but 'I display my judgement to secure belonging'. The moral language intensifies while moral responsibility dissipates. Condemnation becomes a social currency, and the old ethical question 'is anger justified?' is quietly replaced by a newer one: 'is anger shareable?' Roland Barthes's account of connotation sharpens the point. Images are never encountered in a pure state; they arrive coded by ideology and read through cultural knowledge. The danger is not that outrage is always misguided, but that outrage is often experienced as natural, as if moral certainty were a property of the image itself rather than an effect of accumulated coding. Once history is transformed into 'nature', anger is felt as mandatory and dissent is framed as moral failure. Outrage becomes the sign of virtue, and restraint looks like complicity. The moral life is then reorganised around predictable triggers rather than reflective judgement. Outrage theory therefore reframes the morality of anger as an ecological question. Anger can still be a rational and ethically serious response, but digital environments alter its formation, its targets, and its incentives. The task is not to abolish anger but to recover moral agency inside systems designed to automate moral reaction. Moral anger retains value when it remains accountable to what happened, to whom it happened, and to what repair requires. Outrage becomes morally corrosive when it is severed from those constraints and reattached to visibility, punishment, and identity performance, turning judgement into a programmable reflex rather than an ethical act.

[92] Flusser, V. (2011) Into the Universe of Technical Images. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Barthes, R. (1977) Image, Music, Text. London: Fontana.

From Vengeance to Managed Outrage

Martha C. Nussbaum's Anger and Forgiveness[93] reworks the ancient drama of the Furies into a contemporary problem: how anger changes its moral meaning once it is no longer a private impulse but a publicly engineered energy inside networked communication. Nussbaum begins with Aeschylus' Oresteia because it stages two transformations that still matter. The first is institutional: Athena interrupts the cycle of blood vengeance by founding legal procedures, independent judgement, and civic adjudication. The second is psychological and moral: the Furies themselves change. They do not merely accept new external constraints while remaining the same vindictive beings; they undergo a reorientation so deep that even their name changes. The point is not only that law replaces revenge, but that justice requires a transformation of moral sentiment. At the start of Eumenides, the Furies are depicted as unbridled anger in almost zoological form: doglike pursuit, blood imagery, obsessive repetition, delight in torment. They exist to punish, and their punishment is not measured accountability but raw retaliation. Nussbaum stresses that this is not a decorative mythic flourish. It is a theory of anger enacted as horror. If anger is allowed to rule, it becomes single-minded, cruel, and non-rational, and a political community cannot simply 'house' such a force and call the result justice. A cage does not convert wildness into fairness. Athena's persuasion therefore functions as a model of moral governance. She does not ask the Furies to disappear; she asks them to be remade. They must abandon fixation on payback and adopt benevolent sentiments toward the city. They must listen to persuasion, restrain the intoxicating force of anger, and become agents of blessings rather than blight. This is why the transformation is not only political but ethical: the city is founded on a disciplined emotional economy. Awe remains, because wrongdoing must be deterred, but targeted accountability is separated from the fantasy that another's suffering can restore what was lost. Nussbaum's central claim is that anger is 'always normatively problematic' because it contains, conceptually, a wish that it would be good if the wrongdoer suffered. This wish can take a 'payback' form, the idea that retaliation restores balance, which she calls incoherent and 'magical'. Or it can take a 'status' form, where injury is read as down-ranking, and retaliation seems effective precisely because it humiliates the offender and elevates the victim. But this road is morally ugly because it turns ethics into status competition. In both cases, anger risks becoming a technology of domination rather than a pathway to justice. This critique becomes especially sharp within the conditions described across this book. In networked media environments, anger is rarely left in its personal, local form. It is selected, amplified, rewarded, and routinised. It becomes a communicative resource. What Aeschylus depicted as a monstrous force that must be transformed now appears as a profitable force that is constantly re-triggered. The architecture of digital attention does not merely transmit anger; it trains it. Outrage becomes a public performance of judgement, and moral language becomes the mechanism through which audiences are organised, enemies are stabilised, and cohesion is purchased. Here the Oresteia offers an unexpected warning. A political community that cannot transform its Furies cannot escape civil war. Nussbaum highlights Athena's specific prohibitions: do not stir factional conflict, do not intoxicate the city with angry passion, do not bring premature death. These prohibitions map eerily well onto contemporary outrage cycles. Outrage as a media logic repeatedly tempts publics toward factional escalation, compresses time into immediate condemnation, and inflames punitive fantasies. In such conditions, anger becomes easier to mobilise than deliberation, and punishment becomes easier to desire than reform. Nussbaum proposes a solution she calls the 'Transition': the shift from backward-looking payback to

[93] Nussbaum, M. (2016) Anger and Forgiveness, Oxford University Press

forward-looking welfare. The pure form of ‘Transition-Anger’ has a minimal content: ‘How outrageous. Something should be done about that.’ It signals wrongdoing without demanding that suffering be added to suffering. Yet she also notes how rarely this purity exists. Most anger is infected with payback wishes, and modern culture often disguises those wishes as moral seriousness. The result is an ethics of accusation that feels like justice but often reproduces the very cruelty it condemns. Within the framework of outrage theory, the moral task is to build institutions, habits, and rhetorical disciplines that can accomplish an Aeschylean transformation under digital conditions. The question is not whether anger will exist, but whether it will remain doglike and obsessive, or whether it can become measured judgement in defence of future life. The moral alternative is not sentimental forgiveness-as-ritual, but a triad Nussbaum places at the end of her introduction: generosity, justice, and truth. These are the sentiments capable of disarming the payback fantasy while still sustaining accountability.

The Moral Discipline of Daimonic Rage

Stephen A. Diamond’s discussion[94] of the daimonic in relation to anger, madness, violence, evil and creativity reinterprets rage as a paradoxical moral resource whose direction depends on how it is cultivated within contemporary outrage systems rather than merely felt as private emotion. The cultural demand to repress anger often produces a second repression: the suppression of the energetic material from which people shape meaning, identity, and action. This is why the question is never simply whether anger is ‘bad’ or ‘good’, but whether anger is transformed into a constructive force or captured by destructive scripts. Diamond’s core move is to treat creativity as a practice of giving form to inner and outer chaos. Creativity is not limited to art; it includes the psychological labour of reworking one’s inner world and then attempting, where possible, to reshape the outer world rather than merely adjust to it. Rollo May’s point is crucial here: creativity begins in the gap between expectation and reality. But that gap can be lived in two opposed ways. In pathological states, expectation and reality become a contradiction that cannot be resolved, so reality is distorted. In productive activity, expectation functions as a lever: it is used to alter reality progressively, bringing the two into closer alignment. Anger is one of the energies that makes this lever move. Rage intensifies the felt urgency of the gap. It can either push a person into distortion, delusion, or compulsive attack, or it can push a person into disciplined transformation. In this book’s terms, this distinction maps onto the difference between cultivated anger and automated outrage. Cultivated anger is a force that remains answerable to meaning and judgement. Automated outrage is anger converted into an infrastructure: a repeatable response pattern, socially rewarded and technically amplified. Outrage networks do not create anger from nothing; they harvest it, package it, and circulate it. The more frequently a person is exposed to cues of threat, humiliation, or moral transgression, the more anger becomes habitual, and the more it functions as a pre-set interpretive lens. At that point, anger ceases to be a signal and becomes a style of perception. It stops being a moment and becomes a programme. Diamond’s language of the daimonic helps explain why this matters morally. The daimonic names a real power in human life: the drive that can generate creativity and vitality, but also cruelty and destruction. Creativity can be understood as the constructive utilisation of this power. Yet the same source can also generate evil, because the daimonic does not arrive with an ethical label attached. It

[94] Diamond, S.A. (2010) Anger, Madness and the Daimonic: The Paradoxical Power of Rage in Violence, Evil and Creativity. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

arrives as energy, compulsion, and intensity. The moral question is discernment: what is being done with the energy? The text's examples make the point concrete. Rage can be transmuted into symbolic violence that prevents real violence, as in the case of Niki de Saint Phalle's 'shooting paintings', which turned fury into an aesthetic act rather than an act of bodily harm. Rage can also coexist with cruelty, as in the portrait of Picasso's misogyny and sadistic abuse, where creativity appears alongside moral failure. The lesson is not that creativity redeems violence, nor that suffering guarantees artistic achievement, but that the same inner fire can drive both construction and harm. The daimonic amplifies human agency. It does not purify it. This is why outrage theory becomes inseparable from morality. Digital environments encourage a specific cultivation of anger: the kind that is immediate, performative, identity-affirming, and punitive. Algorithms reward speed, certainty, and moral display, not careful discernment. Anger is invited to function as public proof of belonging. Under such conditions, daimonic energy is channelled toward accusation, scapegoating, and the exhilaration of group alignment. The result resembles a cultural version of 'possession': not mystical, but behavioural, a collective drift toward compulsive reaction. A moral framework must therefore move beyond the false choice between repression and indulgence. Repressing anger can freeze creativity and leave conflict unresolved. Indulging outrage can turn anger into cruelty with a righteous face. Cultivation offers a third path: learning the contours of one's own anger, testing its sources, and directing it toward transformation rather than retaliation. The moral task is not to eliminate daimonic energy, but to discipline it into form: to convert rage into work, speech, art, repair, or principled resistance, and to refuse the ready-made scripts that outrage infrastructures continually supply.

Anger as Moral Work, Not Moral Fuel

Owen Flanagan's How to Do Things with Emotions[95] treats anger not as a timeless moral constant but as a culturally scripted practice whose ethical value changes once it is absorbed into the infrastructures of digital communication. The central distinction is simple but decisive: one question asks what anger in fact does inside moral life, and another asks what anger ought to do. The first belongs to psychology, sociology, anthropology, and politics, because it requires thick description of how anger is learned, performed, rewarded, and punished across social settings. The second belongs to ethics, because it requires reasons, standards, and justifications. In outrage-driven media systems these questions cannot be kept apart, because anger's practical functions are increasingly engineered by attention markets and platform incentives, while moral judgement is simultaneously reshaped by the same machinery. The anthropological record matters here because it disrupts any easy claim that a familiar, modern style of anger is either necessary or 'normal' in a robust human sense. Anger can be organised differently, minimised, ritualised, or treated as categorically unwholesome, and moral life continues. This does not prove that anger is always wrong, but it breaks the spell of inevitability. It widens the moral possibility space and reveals that prevailing anger norms are choices embedded in institutions, not destiny written into biology. Once this space is visible, the ethical question becomes practical: which anger scripts deserve reinforcement, and which deserve reform or discouragement, especially when digital networks amplify anger into public spectacle. Two common forms of harmful anger appear with particular clarity in outrage economies. Payback

[95] Flanagan, O. (2021) How to Do Things with Emotions: The Morality of Anger and Shame across Cultures. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

anger is the explicit wish to hurt another person as compensation for injury or insult, a retributive script that treats suffering as moral restoration. Pain-passing anger is more careless and diffuse: personal distress is converted into aggression toward convenient targets, often unrelated to the original source of harm. Both scripts are structurally compatible with the political economy of outrage, because both produce sharp, contagious performances that attract attention, consolidate in-groups, and degrade opponents into moral objects. In such conditions, anger becomes not only a response to wrongdoing but a communicative commodity, circulating because it performs well, not because it is accurate or proportionate. The alternative is not moral anaesthesia. Anger can be justified when it functions as accountability rather than punishment, when it aims at correction, repair, deterrence, or the removal of harmful power, and when it does not treat cruelty as a moral goal. This introduces a distinction between intending pain and causing pain. Accountability often produces discomfort, guilt, or shame, yet the ethical issue is whether the pain is a predictable side-effect of truthful confrontation or the primary aim of the act. In the first case, discomfort can be an instrument of moral learning; in the second, discomfort becomes a theatre of domination. Cross-cultural comparison makes another pressure point visible: some moral traditions treat anger as a vice almost without exception, not because injustice is denied, but because hatred and vindictiveness are seen as corrupting the moral agent and the moral community. This challenges the modern habit of equating moral seriousness with heated affect. It also clarifies the risk that outrage infrastructures exploit: status anxiety can masquerade as moral injury, and the desire to downgrade opponents can masquerade as righteous concern. The more anger becomes performative, the easier it is for humiliation to be sold as justice. The chapter's task, then, is to shift attention from anger as an internal feeling to anger as a social technique, and from outrage as moral purity to outrage as governance. Reflective moral critique requires looking at anger scripts as if they were tools: which ones stabilise moral community and which ones dissolve it into cycles of accusation and retaliation. Digital networks intensify the need for this scrutiny because they reward quick anger, repeatable anger, and public anger, while stripping away context and discouraging restraint. Under such conditions, reform is not a matter of preaching calm but of cultivating better forms of anger: anger that resists payback, refuses pain-passing, remains oriented toward repair, and stays accountable to truth rather than spectacle. The aim is not the elimination of anger but the recovery of moral agency in how anger is done, expressed, and circulated, especially when platforms are designed to convert moral emotion into perpetual engagement.

Rage as political virtue

Jennifer Kling's 'Rage against the Machine: The Virtues of Anger in Response to Oppression' in The Ethics of Anger[96], argues that anger can be morally compromised in interpersonal life yet politically virtuous when directed at oppressive systems, especially in media environments that industrialise outrage. Oppression does not operate like ordinary wrongdoing between individuals. It is not simply a matter of one person harming another. It is a background structure that assigns social meaning to actions, distributes credibility unequally, and turns small interactions into cumulative moral injury for particular groups. That is why the moral and political projects of anger can come apart. Anger at a person can be misplaced when that person is not fully blameworthy, yet anger at the 'public highway' of oppression can remain fitting,

[96] Kling, J. (2019) 'Rage against the Machine: The Virtues of Anger in Response to Oppression', in Lewis, C.D. and Bock, G.L. (eds.) The Ethics of Anger. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

even necessary, because the system keeps producing the same injuries through shifting forms. This distinction matters for the architecture of moral outrage networks. Digital platforms invite users to collapse structural problems into personalised enemies. They encourage direct blame, public shaming, and quick punishment, because these acts produce engagement. Yet the political virtue Kling defends depends on resisting precisely this collapse. The target is the system and its institutional logic, not the nearest individual available for symbolic sacrifice. When anger becomes a tool for scapegoating, it loses its political intelligence and becomes an algorithmic resource. When anger is cultivated as constructive rage, it retains orientation toward repair and transformation. Kling frames anger as a spectrum rather than a single moral substance. At one extreme lies the refusal of anger, the posture of the excuser, the detached spectator, or the person trained to intellectualise injustice until it becomes a neutral topic. This posture often appears sophisticated, but it can function as moral anaesthetic. It blunts recognition of wrongs and reduces the possibility of collective mobilisation. At the other extreme lies blind rage, anger that cannot discriminate among targets, cannot modulate intensity, and cannot hold itself accountable. In networked settings this rage is easily rewarded, because it is contagious, spectacular, and legible to algorithms. But it is also exhausting, corrosive, and politically counterproductive, because it turns moral conflict into permanent volatility. Between these extremes stands the possibility of constructive rage, associated with bell hooks and Audre Lorde, anger that is ‘loaded with information and energy’ and capable of clarifying what is at stake. In the framework of this book, constructive rage is the form of anger most resistant to capture by outrage infrastructures. It does not deny the need for moral heat, but it refuses to let moral heat become a substitute for strategy, judgement, or care. It aims to dismantle oppressive structures rather than to indulge the pleasures of punishment. It does not require that individuals be hated in order for institutions to be opposed. It is a disciplined hostility toward the system’s reproducing logic. Kling’s most useful metaphor is the vaccine. Oppression often feels like an endless game of whack-a-mole: a victory against one form produces the migration of oppression into another. This generates exhaustion, cynicism, and despair. Constructive rage can act like a vaccine against these states, not by denying the scale of the problem but by refusing the conclusion that nothing can change. Anger, when fitting, treats its target as responsive, as capable of hearing, resisting, adapting, or conceding. In this sense anger presupposes agency, and therefore presupposes the possibility of reform. That is why constructive rage can sustain hope. It forces recognition that oppressive systems are maintained through human decisions and can be dismantled through human decisions, even if slowly and unevenly. This also explains why constructive rage can become a political virtue rather than merely a political instrument. A tool can be used or put away depending on costs and benefits. A virtue shapes perception, judgement, and endurance. Constructive rage, when guided by practical wisdom, helps a person live with dignity inside an oppressive environment without internalising the system’s verdicts. It disrupts false consciousness and rejects the moral whisper that blames victims for what the system produces. It can also generate social flourishing by supporting shared refusal of degrading identities and imposed roles. In this way anger becomes not only protest but self-preservation, a mode of psychic resistance. The danger, however, is that digital outrage markets continuously tempt anger away from virtue and toward performance. Outrage becomes an identity display, a competition for moral intensity, a punishment ritual, and a profitable stream of engagement. In such conditions, the ethical task is not to abandon anger but to cultivate it as a form of political care: targeted, informed, proportionate, and oriented toward dismantling structures rather than consuming persons.

Constructive rage is not the opposite of reason; it is reason's heat-source when oppression is normalised. The imperative is to rage against the machine without becoming machinery.

Yoda's Shadow and the Ethics of Acceptance

Court D. Lewis[97] and Gregory L. Bock's 'Avoiding the Dark Side: Anger in Popular Culture' in The Ethics of Anger, this section reframes Star Wars philosophy around a claim often softened in mainstream readings: the Dark Side is not a detachable error that can be eliminated without remainder, but the crucial counterweight through which the Force becomes intelligible as balance rather than purity. Plato's Republic supplies the classical warning that certain stories should be censored because they educate the young into corruption, especially through thymos, the spirited element that can slide into anger, aggression, and civic disorder. Star Wars inherits this anxiety in its most famous line of moral instruction: 'Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.' The Jedi Order turns this into institutional doctrine, translating moral education into emotional prohibition: attachment is restricted, intimacy is regulated, and the ideal self is imagined as a polished surface from which rage can be wiped away. That doctrine, however, is precisely where Star Wars reveals its darker and more sophisticated moral psychology. The saga's centre of gravity is not a sermon against anger, but a narrative about the cost of denial and the danger of pretending that darkness is only external. Anakin's fall demonstrates how the attempt to control anger through repression and rules can generate the conditions for catastrophe. Fear of loss becomes a moral panic; moral panic becomes a craving for certainty; certainty becomes obedience to manipulation. The Jedi do not simply fail to stop his anger. They misrecognise the function of the shadow within the self, and so they treat inner darkness as an enemy to be expelled rather than an element to be integrated and disciplined. One of the smallest yet most decisive episodes in the entire Star Wars universe makes this point with unusual clarity: the moment in The Clone Wars when Master Yoda journeys to face his own dark shadow. The episode's significance lies in its refusal of the easy moral that evil is 'out there'. The shadow is not a separate demon to be defeated in combat. It is Yoda, stripped of the comforting mask of sanctity. The initial impulse is exactly what Jedi training predicts: confront, resist, strike, deny. Yet exhaustion arrives, and with it a recognition that permanent resistance is not mastery. The shadow returns because it belongs. At the crucial point Yoda stops trying to destroy it and allows it to enter him. Control follows only after admission, not before. The lesson is not indulgence but realism: the Dark Side cannot be managed by pretending it is not part of the moral agent. This scene changes the meaning of 'balance'. Balance is not achieved by erasing anger but by ordering it, naming it, and preventing it from becoming autonomous. In a media ecology that profits from outrage, this matters because the public sphere constantly invites the opposite strategy: deny inner resentment, then outsource it to enemies; deny inner fear, then convert it into moral crusade; deny inner shame, then convert it into punishment rituals. Outrage infrastructures thrive on projection. They reward the performance of righteousness precisely because it hides the shadow behind a mask of virtue. The result is a politics of purity that is permanently haunted by what it refuses to acknowledge. Star Wars offers a harsher ethic: moral adulthood requires contact with the shadow. Yoda's encounter implies that a stable moral self is not a self without darkness, but a self that has met its darkness without romanticising it, and without turning it into a licence for harm. This is why the Dark Side is the most important topic in Star Wars philosophy. It is the

[97] Lewis, C.D. and Bock, G.L. (eds.) (2019) The Ethics of Anger. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

narrative device that refuses sentimental moralism and forces attention onto the conditions under which anger becomes either disciplined force or devouring possession. The Dark Side gives the Force its moral depth, because it makes visible the truth that control is not a product of censorship but of integration, and that denial is often the first step toward being consumed.

Anger: Existential Watchdog of Morality

Chelsea Schein, Amelia Goranson and Kurt Gray's 2015 article[98] 'The uncensored truth about morality' argues that moral outrage is not merely a reaction to immorality but one of the conditions by which morality sustains itself, because morality is permanently contested and therefore requires vigilance, accusation, and enforcement to remain socially real. The usual story treats outrage as a malfunction: too much emotion, too little reason, too much tribalism. Yet the deeper problem is simpler and more unsettling. Moral anger arises not only from disagreement about particular acts, but from disagreement about morality itself, about what counts as harm, what counts as a victim, and what counts as an agent. If morality is a contested map of reality, moral anger is the mechanism that defends the borders of that map. Outrage becomes morality's watchdog, and in a networked environment it becomes an industrial watchdog, amplified into a permanent alert system. Dyadic morality helps clarify why moral disagreement is so durable. Moral judgement, in this view, works through a template: an intentional agent harms a suffering patient. Moral condemnation is strongest when a powerful 'thinking doer' is seen to harm a vulnerable 'feeler', and the most reliable moral rhetoric is the rhetoric of harm. This is why appeals like 'think of the children' appear so frequently. The point is not that people are cynically manipulating audiences, though manipulation can occur. The point is that the moral mind is tuned to detect, infer, and complete harm. When harm is central to the template, two consequences follow. First, what seems harmful seems wrong. Second, what seems wrong seems harmful. The second is decisive: once an act is categorised as immoral, the mind tends to search for, infer, or even perceive harm, even where harm is ambiguous or contested. Morality, then, does not simply respond to harm; it produces perceptions of harm as part of how it maintains the category of wrongdoing. This is where moral anger becomes structurally necessary. If moral judgement is a categorisation process tied to harm-perception, then moral anger is the emotional instrument that flags violations, recruits attention, and demands response. Anger makes moral boundaries visible. It is not only a private feeling but a public signal: a siren that declares 'a moral event has occurred' and pressures others to align, condemn, punish, exclude, repair, or escalate. In traditional communities this signalling function is constrained by proximity, reputational feedback, and the long memory of shared life. In digital environments those constraints weaken. Signals travel faster than context, and the costs of signalling can be offloaded onto strangers. Under these conditions, the watchdog can become a machine: outrage is selected for intensity, portability, and repeatability, because these properties fit platform incentives. The result is not simply 'more anger' but a different political economy of moral emotion. The censorship example in the 2015 discussion illustrates how disagreement about morality becomes disagreement about harm itself. One side sees a practice as harmless adult behaviour; another sees it as harm to minors, harm to society, or harm to moral order. Both sides may claim to be defending the vulnerable, but they disagree about what vulnerability is and where it resides. This produces a crucial implication for the

[98] Schein, C., Goranson, A. and Gray, K. (2015) 'The uncensored truth about morality', The Psychologist, 28(12), pp. 982–985.

book's framework. Moral disagreement is rarely a clean dispute between reason and irrationality. It is often a dispute between competing harm-perceptions, competing assignments of mind and suffering, competing stories about who is being injured and who is doing the injuring. That is why moral conflicts persist even when factual information is shared. The conflict is not only empirical; it is interpretive and perceptual. Where minds are perceived, the potential for evil is perceived. Where suffering is perceived, the demand for condemnation is perceived. Anger follows. This suggests a more radical thesis: morality does not merely generate occasional anger; morality may require anger in order to exist as a social fact. Morality without enforcement collapses into preference. Morality without emotional force collapses into polite opinion. Moral anger functions as the affective proof that a norm is not optional. It marks certain boundaries as non-negotiable and threatens social cost for violation. From this angle, moral emotion is not an embarrassing remainder of primitive life but the engine that keeps moral categories operative in collective life. That engine is also dangerous, because it can be hijacked by false harm-perceptions, manipulated by entrepreneurs of outrage, or directed at scapegoats. Yet the point remains: the mechanism that makes morality socially binding is the same mechanism that makes moral conflict combustible. This is why outrage economies thrive. Digital systems do not invent moral disagreement. They discover its energy-density and build infrastructures to harvest it. The moral dyad offers them a simple formula for content that travels: identify a villain with agency, identify a victim with vulnerability, dramatise intention, magnify suffering, and invite an audience into condemnation. The more legible the dyad, the faster the spread. Moral anger becomes an attention currency because it compresses complex moral interpretation into immediate alignment. It tells audiences where to stand before they know what they know. It produces group coherence by making disagreement costly and ambiguity suspicious. Anger is not a deviation from moral life but one of its structural and existential conditions, emerging wherever shared norms are asserted, violated, and defended. Moral outrage functions as morality's own watchdog, a publicly visible signal that values exist, boundaries matter, and collective judgement is still operative. In this sense, the conspicuousness of anger is precisely what transforms it from a private emotion into a moral act, binding individuals into networks of responsibility, accusation, shame and belonging. The final implication is not that morality should be abandoned, but that moral maturity must include awareness of how morality manufactures anger as its own guardian. In a culture saturated by networked outrage, the ethical task becomes double: to keep moral sensitivity to harm without allowing harm-perception to be manufactured into permanent hostility; to preserve moral seriousness without surrendering judgement to the automatic dyadic script; to recognise that outrage can be a sign of moral concern while also being a resource that systems exploit. Moral anger may be a condition for morality's existence, but it is not proof of moral truth. The watchdog keeps the house awake, yet it can also be trained to bark at shadows.

Conclusion: The Structural Necessity of Moral Anger

This book began from a simple but unsettling observation: contemporary public life is no longer organised primarily around shared truths, stable values, or deliberative reason, but around the circulation of moral anger. What initially appeared as a pathological excess of digital culture gradually revealed itself, across the chapters, as something far more fundamental. Moral anger is not a malfunction of modern societies but one of their constitutive forces. The task of this conclusion is therefore not to lament outrage, but to situate it sociologically, historically, and structurally, and to return to the core hypotheses advanced at the beginning of the book.

The first premise guiding the argument has been that there is no society without collective morality. Human groups, regardless of scale or historical period, require shared norms that distinguish acceptable from unacceptable behaviour, insiders from outsiders, and legitimacy from transgression. Collective morality is not optional; it is the minimal condition for social coordination, trust, and continuity. Even societies that claim to be post-moral or purely procedural continue to operate through implicit moral hierarchies and affective boundaries.

The second premise follows directly: there is no system of morality without moral emotions, and among them moral anger and moral shame play a central role. Moral rules that are never defended, violated without reaction, or enforced without emotional investment cease to function as moral rules. Anger signals that a boundary has been crossed; shame signals that one belongs to a community whose judgement matters. These emotions are not secondary embellishments to morality but its enforcement mechanisms. Without them, morality would collapse into abstract codes without social force.

From these two premises the third follows logically: there cannot be a society without moral anger and moral outrage. Wherever norms exist, there will be indignation when those norms are violated. Wherever values are asserted, there will be conflict over their interpretation. Moral anger is therefore not a deviation from social order but one of its conditions of existence. This insight reframes much of the contemporary anxiety surrounding outrage culture. What appears new is not anger itself, but its scale, speed, visibility, and infrastructural embedding. The seven hypotheses articulated in this book were designed to trace this transformation.

The first hypothesis proposed that moral anger has shifted from a situational emotion grounded in local experience to a linguistic and infrastructural phenomenon embedded in global communication systems. Across the analysis of platforms, media architectures, and algorithmic incentives, this hypothesis has been confirmed. Anger today is produced, formatted, circulated, and monetised through language fragments optimised for visibility rather than understanding.

The second hypothesis, that feelings defeat facts in digital environments, explains why moral anger has become the dominant currency of public communication. Facts require time, context, and interpretative labour. Anger requires only resonance. In networked settings governed by speed and attention scarcity, emotional activation consistently outperforms factual persuasion. This does not imply that truth has disappeared, but that its social efficacy has been subordinated to affective force.

The third hypothesis identified anger as a primary engine of collective belonging. Historical analysis showed that anger has always played this role, from kinship revenge and religious zeal to nationalist mobilisation. What is distinctive today is the openness with which anger is used to manufacture audiences and consolidate identity. Digital communities are less often formed around shared projects than around shared enemies, shared offences, and shared indignation.

The fourth hypothesis linked the growth of moral anger to the scale and complexity of society. As social systems expand and interpersonal proximity declines, intimacy is replaced by abstraction. In dense urban and bureaucratic environments, anger becomes a substitute for trust and familiarity, offering a rapid way to coordinate moral judgement among strangers. Digital societies extend this logic globally, producing what might be called urban moral rage without cities.

The fifth hypothesis described the emergence of anger management governance. Modern power no longer seeks simply to suppress anger, but to modulate it. Platforms and political institutions alternately stimulate outrage to mobilise attention and pacify it to maintain stability. The administration of moral anger has become a routine technique of governance rather than an exceptional crisis response.

The sixth hypothesis argued that moral anger has become a circulating collective affect rather than a private feeling. This was demonstrated through the analysis of viral outrage cycles, comment economies, and algorithmic amplification. Anger now moves through populations independently of individual intention, shaping perception, alignment, and hostility through repeated exposure.

The seventh hypothesis addressed identity. In societies where moral reference points are unstable and long-term commitments erode, individuals increasingly define themselves through what they publicly condemn. Displays of indignation become signals of belonging and virtue, even when detached from sustained action. Identity through indignation replaces identity through vocation, belief, or tradition.

Taken together, these hypotheses converge on a single conclusion: moral outrage networks are not an anomaly of the digital age but its dominant moral form. As societies become global, dispersed, and infrastructural, their moral emotions adapt accordingly. Anger grows with society. When societies digitise, anger digitises. With moral anger inevitably come outrage, offence, aggression, symbolic violence, libel, cursing, hate speech, profiling, and stereotyping. These are not aberrations that can be eliminated without eliminating morality itself. They are the shadow side of collective moral life.

This does not mean that all expressions of anger are justified, nor that regulation is futile. It means that regulation must begin from sociological realism rather than moral panic. Attempts to eradicate outrage misunderstand its function. What can be governed is not the existence of anger, but its circulation, escalation, and instrumentalisation. The future of collective morality will therefore not be defined by moral consensus, but by competing infrastructures of indignation. Moral order will be shaped less by shared truths than by shared triggers. Power will increasingly belong to those who can induce, channel, and neutralise outrage most effectively. This is why a new sociology of digital anger is necessary. Moral outrage networks are not merely cultural phenomena; they are structural conditions of contemporary social life. To understand them is not to excuse them, but to recognise that morality itself, in networked societies, now speaks most loudly through anger. Popular mythology sometimes captures structural truths that formal theory hesitates to state directly, and in this case a scene from Star Wars articulates with unusual precision a problem at the centre of any sociology of moral anger. When Master Yoda confronts his dark shadow on Moraband his insight marks the end of moral innocence: anger is not conquered by denial but governed through recognition, becoming a condition of balance rather than a deviation from it.

'I accept that you are part of me.'

Master Yoda

(Star Wars: The Clone Wars, Season 6, Episode 13 (Sacrifice)

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